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THE MASQUE OF SHADOWS

AND OTHER POEMS.





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MR. PAYNE'S WORKS.

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THE  
MASQUE OF SHADOWS  
AND  
OTHER POEMS

BY

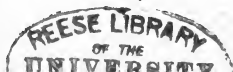
JOHN PAYNE

*NEW EDITION.*

LONDON:

W. H. ALLEN & Co., 13 WATERLOO PLACE.

1884.



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P5

M3

1884

MAIN

TO

MY FRIEND

ARTHUR W. E. O'SHAUGHNESSY.





*HIS is the House of Dreams. Whoso is  
fain*

*To enter in this shadow-land of mine,  
He must forget the utter Summer's shine*

*And all the daylight ways of hand and brain :*

*Here is the white moon ever on the wane,*

*And here the air is sad with many a sign*

*Of haunting mysteries,—the golden wine*

*Of June falls never, nor the silver rain*

*Of hawthorns pallid with the joy of Spring ;*

*But many a mirage of pale memories*

*Veils up the sunless aisles : upon the breeze*

*A music of waste sighs doth float and sing ;*

*And in the shadow of the sad-flower'd trees,*

*The ghosts of men's desire walk wandering.*





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## ERRATA.

Page 9, line 14, *read* "Did grave strange signs of awe  
and *doom*."

Page 112, line 1, *for* "forespent" *read* "*forspent*."

Page 114, verse iv. line 2, *for* "grass-swathes" *read*  
"grass-*swaths*."

Page 118, line 5, *for* "forewent" *read* "*forwent*."





THE MASQUE OF SHADOWS.



“ La mort contient l'espérance infinie.”

*Leconte de Lisle.*



## THE MASQUE OF SHADOWS.

**D**ILED earth above my head did lie,  
And from my sight the flower-blue sky  
Was hidden by a waste of stone,  
And I in earth was left alone  
To search the secrets of the tomb.

Waste night was there and speechless gloom,—  
And I thought not nor wonderéd,  
Nor groped into the dusk with dread,  
For Death had crown'd me with a crown  
Of Lethe-weeds, that bound me down  
In opiate trances. In a swoon  
Of death I lay, wherein the moon  
Seem'd spread above me like a flower,  
That glitters in the midnight hour  
Above the glass of some strange lake,  
And from it falling dews did slake  
My yearning for the coming things.

*THE MASQUE*

Meseem'd my soul had lost its wings,  
And could not lift itself away  
From out that prison-place of clay.  
Strange peace possess'd me and content ;  
Meseem'd the springs of wonderment  
And fear were lapsed from me with death,  
And with the 'scape of earthly breath  
Desire was dead of heart and brain.

The memories of joy and pain  
Had in the life that goes before  
The change of being, in the core  
Of that great darkness, glitter'd yet,  
In characters of silver set  
Against the gloom ; but in my breast  
Their scroll-work was a palimpsest  
Whereon no writing, bright or dark,  
Did burn. My soul their forms did mark,  
As one that looks upon a masque  
With absent eyes, too dull to ask  
Of what these shadows told and whom :  
Death fill'd me so, there was no room  
For aught that unto life pertain'd.

And so the ages came and waned  
(Meseem'd) and in a sleep of sound  
And sight, I lay within the ground,  
Lapt in a trance of senselessness.  
So hard the stillness seem'd to press

Upon me, that methought I sank,  
Athwart the centre black and dank,  
A fathom deep with every age :  
And, as I went, strange fires did rage  
Before me : caverns in the rock,  
Wherein pent gases for the shock  
Of earthquakes lay engarner'd up :  
Red flames, that boil'd within a cup  
Of adamant, and grisly shapes,  
That mopp'd and mow'd like devils' apes  
As I sank past them, like a stone  
That to the deepest deeps is thrown  
Of some dull sea : and here the ground  
Shook with the phantom of a sound,  
As if some cataract of flame  
Roar'd down the channels without name  
That tunnel all the middle world :  
And here strange midworld thunders hurl'd  
And echo'd, beating back the sound  
With lurid jets of flame, that wound  
And leapt and crawl'd, like hell-fire snakes  
A-pastime.

Now I pass'd grim lakes,  
Whereon a silence horrible  
Did brood, and from the darkness fell  
Into the pool great gouts of blood,  
And redden'd all the grisly flood  
With livid flakes.

*THE MASQUE*

And then again

I fell and fell, athwart a rain  
(Methought) of stars, that long had lost,  
For some old sin, the glittering ghost  
That lit their orbits,—white and pale,  
Prick'd out against the grave-grey veil  
Of the stern darkness, like a flight  
Of moths against an Autumn night,  
Spectral and sad.

And now a roar

Of hollow-moaning torrents tore  
The ghastly calm, and white wild waves  
Rent up the crannied midworld caves  
About me : and I saw afar  
A phosphorescence like a star  
Floating above the grey abyss  
Of waters, like a soul that is  
Doom'd to dim wanderings o'er the sea  
Of some unterm'd eternity.  
And as I sank, I felt the throng  
Of waves beneath me, and along  
The lightless caverns I was borne  
Betwixt harsh flaming rocks, betorn  
With clash of waves and billows' war,  
Towards the ever-distant star,  
Set in the mystic veils of gloom.

Roars rent the earth in all her womb,  
As, bearing me, the torrent fled



Past all the seats of quick and dead  
In the red centre ; and the core  
Of the huge mountains, that upbore  
The pinnacles of heaven, groan'd  
With the fierce pain : the black rocks moan'd,  
And all the deeps cried out for rage  
And fear.

And still, for many an age,  
Methought the stream fell evermore  
And I with it, athwart the roar  
Of clashing powers,—and still the light  
Fled farther through the hideous night  
Above the grisly torrent-flow  
And the rock-cataracts.

And so,  
For centuries I fell and fell  
Past all the flaming mouths of hell,  
Until at last meseem'd the spell  
Of sleep that bound me stronger grew,  
As 'twere grim hands of darkness drew  
Curtains of bronze about my sense ;  
And all the shadow grew so dense,  
That sight and hearing utterly  
Were for a time bereft from me,  
And I was soulless for a space.

Then suddenly the swart embrace

Of night was slack'd, and all the chains  
Of blackness loosed me ; and with pains  
Unutterable, sense tore back  
Into my brain ; and with the rack,  
I felt that I had ceased to fall :  
Then, gazing up through shroud and pall,  
I saw the coffin-lid had grown  
Translucent as the silver stone  
That moulds the flanges of the moon :  
And through the lid, a light was strewn  
Upon my face, such as is shed  
From many a body of the dead,  
Night-raised beneath the starless sky  
For curséd witchcraft. And as I  
Strove towards the glimmer, I was 'ware  
That all the bands that bound me there  
Had loosed my limbs, and every sense  
Was free from thrall : the cerements  
Slid off, as mists fall from the day,  
And up I stood, a phantom grey  
And awful, in the dim blue gloom.

The place was like some old god's tomb,  
Built high with grisly walls, and ceil'd  
With a black dome-work, like a shield  
Of iron wrought with ebony :  
And there no thing the eye could see,  
Save the gray walls and the pale light,  
That seem'd as 'twere the corpse of night ;

Rotted to phosphorescency :  
But as I paced me endlessly  
About the dismal place, that shone  
With that strange glitter,—blue and wan  
With my long tomb-sleep,—there was shown  
To me a postern in the stone,  
Built low within the wall to mock  
A slit tomb-opening in the rock  
Deep hewn.

I push'd the postern through,  
And as I strove, the glimmer grew  
From out the darkness concentrate  
Into blue globes of fire and fate,  
And on the lintel in the gloom  
Did grave strange signs of awe and gloom,  
In unknown mystic tongues that write  
Runes in the bowels of the night.

The postern open'd, and I past  
Into a place all weird and ghast  
With one eternal emptiness :  
There was no living thing to bless  
The grim dead waste of that sad scape  
With any sign of life or shape.  
Wave after wave, like a pale sea  
Fix'd by some fearful sorcery  
To semblant earth, the grey waste spread  
As limitless as to the dead



The death-swoon seems, within a shroud  
Of silentness. Above, a cloud  
Of vapours, twisted as it were  
By winds long died out of the air,  
Hung like an imminence of doom :  
One felt that never on that gloom  
The breath of Heaven had fallen, nor aye  
Should fall to all eternity.

Then was my spirit sore dismay'd  
By that weird voidness, all outlaid  
Before me, like a dead world's ghost ;  
And back I turn'd me, having lost  
All wish for going and desire  
Save in the grave to rest from fire  
And imminence of mystery.  
But as I groped about to see  
The backward way, behold the door  
Was disappear'd, and there no more  
Was any opening in the grey  
Of the grim rampire.

Then away  
Out of my soul the dull fear past,  
And with swift steps into the vast  
Grey lapses of the plain I went :  
And as I sped my thought was blent  
With a strange lightness of desire,  
That seem'd to draw me ever nigher  
To some completion of my spright.

Wings fail'd me not : I was so light  
Of going that I seem'd to float  
Upon the greyness, like a boat  
Of mid-air souls, that in the night  
Is borne upon the waves of light  
That ripple round the trancéd moon.

Around me lay the night, aswoon  
With second death, so still it was,—  
Save now and then a mote would pass  
Of strange-hued light, and in the mote  
Meseem'd pale presences did float  
Of unknown essence. Blue and weird,  
They rose on me, and disappear'd  
Into the dusk, and suddenly  
I was aware that I did flee  
In a blue vapour, luminous  
With my soul's glimmer, like to those  
That fledted past me.

On and on  
I flitted through the darkness wan ;  
And ever thicker swarm'd the motes  
Like to some shining mist that floats  
Above a marish,—and anon,  
Meseem'd some phantom brightlier shone  
A second's space, as it drew nigh  
Some other flame, and momentarily  
The twain went, circling round and round

*THE MASQUE*

Each other, o'er the grisly ground,  
Striving, it seem'd, to meet ; but ever  
Some viewless hand their love did sever,  
And with a shock of rent desires,  
They leapt asunder.

Then tall spires  
Of flaming bronze rose awfully  
Upon the marges of the sky,  
And round the flames I saw grey things  
That hover'd on their filmy wings  
About the turrets, circle-wise,  
Striving, methought, towards heaven to rise  
On the fierce flood of fire, that bore  
The skyward spires, but evermore  
The frail wings fail'd them, scorch'd away  
By the red flame, and yet the essay  
Renewing ever, from the ground  
They struggled up and circled round  
The pitiless spirals, but again  
To be hurl'd earthward in a rain  
Of passionate fire-flakes.

Still I fled  
Across that desert of the dead,  
And past the towers that burnt aloft  
Like fixt flames, till the air grew soft  
With some strange melody, that rose  
Out of the gloom, with close on close

Of sad and vaporous harmony:  
One could not tell if it should be  
The dim wild wail of sprites forlorn  
Or some weird waftings, upward borne,  
Of perfume from ghost-flowers of night,  
So blended all its sad delight  
Was with the measures of a song  
And the mute harmonies that throng  
And hover from a night-flower's cup:  
And as its phrases waver'd up,  
Ineffable, from out the night  
And its weird silences, each light  
Leant to the cadence, and across  
The air, the pulse harmonious  
Compell'd the ghost-motes to a maze  
Of interwisted rhythmic ways,  
A measure of strange guise wherein  
The rhythms of the song were twin  
With those that sleep in light, and those  
That in the perfumes of the rose  
Throb dumbly aye, by some strange stress  
Evoked from out their silentness  
To vaguest life.

It seem'd to me,  
The sad strange dance's mystery  
Involved all sorrows and all fears,  
All ecstasies of hopes and tears,  
And all the yearning that survives

*THE MASQUE*

To the grey ghosts from bygone lives  
And lives to come, if such shall be,  
Fore-cast by stress of memory :  
A rhythm, slow and interlaced  
With trails of pause, as if thought chased  
A long-loved memory through a maze  
Of desert passion-tangled ways  
For ever hopelessly, and ne'er  
Could win to grasp the vision fair  
And piteous.

And as I gazed  
Upon the dances, unamazed  
For voidness of a ghost's desire,  
A strange faint perfume did aspire  
Through all my sense, and with the scent  
There came a sudden ravishment  
Of dead desires, and there did seize  
Upon me all old memories  
And all the tyrannies of thought,  
A sheaf of all life's shorn threads wrought  
To some weird web of wishful pain.  
The impulses, that from my brain  
Had faded out with life, came back  
With the old eddying whirl and rack  
Of imminent longing ; and the song,  
Meseem'd, in all its closes long  
And soft, exhaled my very soul  
And all its melodies of dole



And striving, wafted through the gate  
Of death,—ah, how most sublimate  
And shadowy!

And no less methought,  
In all the rhythm there was wrought  
For me a sense of winding feet  
And hands stretch'd floatingly to meet  
Celestial hands,—of spiral flames  
Wavering up aye towards vague aims  
Of rest and spirit-peace fulfill'd :  
And with the passion sad and still'd  
Of those weird rhythms, all my sense  
Vibrated, like a lyre-string, tense  
And shaken by a summer wind,  
Until the influences did bind  
My senses to a following  
Of their strange rhythm, and did bring  
My will within some mystic spell  
Of motion, potent to compel  
The uncorpsed essence. So the law  
Of that sad ecstasy did draw  
My spright to it, and, wavering,  
I circled in that mystic ring  
Of song and colour and perfume,  
Athwart the wide, unbroken gloom,  
In a still frenzy of content,  
A sad harmonious ravishment  
Of wan delights. It seem'd to me

The very passionless harmony  
Of aspiration towards the aim  
My soul alive could never name,  
Much less attain to, fill'd the deeps  
Of my void yearning with dim sleeps  
Of Autumn-colour'd seas, that lay  
And sway'd above the iron grey  
Of the grim ocean-bed, and lull'd  
The monsters there to slumber, dull'd  
With melodies monotonous,  
Save one stern thought, that ever was  
Implacable, a snake of Fate,  
In the mid-cavern deeps await  
To fix its stings into my heart  
And rend my being with the smart  
Of its fell fangs, lashing the foam  
To tempest.

So my spright did roam  
In those song-govern'd wanderings,  
And the flower-breathings from the strings  
Of my stretch'd soul drew wave on wave  
Of sighing music, faint and grave  
As the sad ghost-light, 'mid that throng  
Of glimmering presences ; how long  
Meknoweth not ; until, meseem'd  
Upon the far sky-marge there gleam'd  
A reddening glimmer, and there ceased  
Some dele the greyness from the east

Of that sad plain, as 'twere the gloom  
Had with long dint of death become  
Half phosphorescent.

Through the grey  
The shadow-dawn came,—such a day !  
There is no saddest autumn night,  
Grey with the end of the grey light,  
That could its pallor call to mind.  
It was as if a worldward wind  
Brought up from sea-tombs far away  
The shadow-ghost of some dead day,  
Long hidden in the shrouds of years,  
A day made pale with many tears  
And many a memory of affright.  
The shadow-sun rose, ashen-white,  
As 'twere a star dead long ago  
And waked to ghost-life in a swoon,  
Beneath the sorcery of the moon ;  
And as its whiteness wan and chill  
Slid through the void, the air grew still :  
The mystic measures did forsake  
The rhythm of the dance : there brake  
The charm of scents that did compel  
My spell-bound senses, and there fell  
A witchery of silentness  
Upon the plains.

Then, press on press,  
A mist of dreams rose wavering

Out of the earth, and everything  
Changed aspect. All the waste did take  
The semblance of a shadowy lake,  
With shores of marsh, set round with reeds  
And armies of grey-flowering weeds :  
Across the dull unmirroring face  
Of the sad flood, did interlace  
A countless multitude of flowers,  
As colourless as winter hours :  
Great flaccid irises, that erst,  
(I dreamed), in life's long summery burst  
Had flamed with many a bell of blue,  
Mocking the August-tided hue  
Of the sweet sky, or sweltered up  
From the clear lake with many a cup  
Of pers and inde imperial,  
But now were grey and hueless all,  
Phantoms in that phantasmal air  
Of bygone sweets : and too were there  
Strange pallid lilies, sad and wide,  
Streak'd with dull flakes of grey and pied  
With ghosts of many long-dead hues :  
And from the flowers accursèd dews  
Stream'd up in mists towards the light.

And as I gazed, their scent did smite  
Upon my sense, and I was 'ware  
That those curst bells the phantoms were  
Of the rich summer tide of flowers,

That in its golden-threaded hours,  
The passion of my soul pour'd out  
From its fresh song-spring. Past a doubt  
I knew the blossoms of my spring  
And the rich summer's flowering  
Of gold and azure, ay, no less,  
The autumn's blaze of restlessness  
And the dim winter's flowers of snow,—  
And all my heart did overflow  
With bitterness, to see even these  
Lie in the hueless shadow-peace,  
Dead and ghost-pale : for I had long  
Gladden'd myself, that this my song  
Should never die, but 'mid the death,  
Day after day, that cumbereth  
The fine-strung soul, had comforted  
My failing hope with the sweet thought,  
(When this my hopelessness was sped,)  
That these my flowers, that I had wrought  
With pain and urgency of duress,  
Should bloom unsullied from the press  
Of world-worn lives and spare for aye  
The purest part of me to die.

Full long and sadly did I gaze  
Upon them with a drear amaze ;  
For with remembrance had return'd  
The pangs of all the years I burn'd  
Towards an unattainèd goal

Receding ever,—till my soul  
 Was stirr'd by a new wonderment,  
 And from my sense the ghostly scent  
 Before a fresh impress did flee :  
 For there was wroughten suddenly  
 A new enchantment from the veils  
 Of the drawn mists, and all the sails  
 Veer'd thither of my soul.

About

The marish-borders started out  
 A maze of buildings of a dream,  
 Ranges of steads, that all did gleam  
 With white fantastic porticoes ;  
 High temples, with pale ghostly shows  
 Of colonnades and peristyles,  
 Prolong'd and join'd for unknown miles,  
 In maddening endless countlessness.  
 Grey cloister did on cloister press,  
 Far stretching on through devious ways  
 Into the intermittent haze  
 That closed the distance. Through the veil  
 Of mists, thin pinnacles did scale  
 The midmost heaven with mazy spires,  
 Round which, like ways of men's desires,  
 The cloisters strove towards the sky.

It seem'd one vast infinity  
 Of netted ways, most desolate  
 And awful in their silent state,

Their shadeless symmetry of white :  
For, of a verity, one might  
Throughout their solemn mystery  
Wander a long eternity  
And never come to find the end,  
Whereto the devious ways did tend  
In their dim silence-folded heart.

Then, as I stood a space apart,  
No little wondering, from the lake  
The mists that hover'd up did take  
In the dawn-glimmer shadow-shape  
And in pale semblances did drape  
Their shimmery essence. All the air  
Did teem with ghosts, that down the stair  
Of the pale light troop'd from the shore  
And the curst marish to the core  
Of the unending shadow-town.

Throng after throng they lighted down,  
And in grey hosts funereal,  
Dispersed through every cloister'd hall,  
They flitted in the endless aisles  
Of those void mazes,—miles on miles,  
Wandering as 'twere with hopeless eyes  
And outstretch'd eager hands, mere sighs  
Of yearning towards some darling thing,  
For which even death could never bring

*THE MASQUE*

The death of longing : and meseem'd  
Each of the shadowy folk, that stream'd  
Along the cloisters, 'twixt the walls  
Of mist, had in the shadow-halls  
Of the dead dreams, been known of me.  
Methought, in each some fragrancy  
Of my own unfulfill'd desire  
Was prison'd,—and with straining hands,  
I strove towards them : but the bands  
Of some stern Fate did bind my will  
And held me solitary still.

But as I stood and wept for pain  
Of my void yearning, o'er the plain  
Of weeds and flowers, a low chill breeze  
Rose mutely and on me did seize  
With all its fluttering hands of wind :  
So that my semblance, all entwined  
With airy pinions, it did raise  
And waft across the still lake-ways,  
Like some thin down of daffodil  
Or windflower ravish'd up, until  
It set me in the midmost court  
Of the vast halls, wherefrom athwart  
The stillness, all the soundless ways  
Fill'd the grey vistas with a maze  
Of column'd arches. Then the breeze  
Ceased softly from the misted leas,  
And in void wonder I remain'd.



Awhile, in a strange calm, enchain'd  
By some vague sense of coming Fate,  
Mute in the centre court I sate  
And watch'd with absent eyes the flights  
Of that pale crowd of eager sprites  
Athwart the desert columnings :  
And now and then, from unseen strings  
And pipes, soft sighs exanimate  
Of music made the air vibrate  
With vaporous rhythms, and there fell  
The harmonies ineffable  
Of spirit-psalms upon my ear.

And so, through many a lapsing year,  
Meseem'd, I sat nor cared arise,  
Until betwixt those songful sighs  
There swell'd upon my ghostly sense  
A breath of mystic ravishments,  
Such as had waved about my thought,  
When in the earthly life I wrought  
My wish to palaces of dreams,  
Sun-gilded by no earthly beams,  
In visions sweet and intricate.

It seem'd as if some flower of fate,  
For this my secret set apart,  
Breathed out to me its inmost heart  
In trails of perfume, to express  
My uniform'd longing,—with such stress

Of sympathy it seem'd to speak  
To me.

And as I turn'd to seek  
The mystic power, that did fulfil  
My wish with perfume,—on the sill  
Of a low arch, through which a scape  
Of aisles began, I saw a shape  
Array'd in star-prick'd robes of mist,  
Soft sapphire and pale amethyst  
And every tender mystic hue  
Of emblem'd sadness,—and I knew  
A white dream-haunted face, and eyes  
Brimm'd with blue shadowy memories,—  
A sad sweet mouth, that had alone  
In the dim vision-ways been shown  
To my desire.

It was, meseem'd,  
The perfectness of all I dream'd,  
The gathering from strife and storm  
Of all my lost ones, in the form  
Of a fair woman-ghost revealed.

And as I gazed on her, eye-seal'd  
With ravishment, the fair shape came  
Towards me, like a mingled flame  
Of white and blue, till I could see  
Her ghostly beauty perfectly.

There was a light of dim dead grace,  
A wild waste beauty in her face,  
That told of very tender love  
In that sweet world that is above  
Our place of shadows,—love and grief  
Bounden together in one sheaf  
By Death in his pale harvesting.  
In her, dead Love had taken wing  
Out of the ruins of the past,  
A sky-pure thing, that all had cast  
Its chrysalis in the grave-hush.

Then, at her sight, my soul did rush  
To her embraces, as assured  
In her the weakness should be cured  
Of its uncompassèd desire ;  
But she, like a pale lambent fire  
Borne by the wind across the glass  
Of some still marish-pool, did pass  
Out of my reach, within the throat  
Of the grey portal, and did float  
Along the cloisters tremulously,  
Beckoning with backward hand to me  
To follow.

Then did I ensue  
The steps of that fair spirit, through  
A maze of many palaces,  
Builded, it seem'd, with mockeries

Of gold and jewels, that had long  
Lost their glad soul of light among  
The cypress-ways of death,—through halls  
Of cunning fretwork, where the walls  
Were hung with arras, that of old  
Had glow'd with blazon'd pearl and gold  
And all sweet colours that one sees  
In the fair dream-embroideries,  
Wrought by no earthly skill to sheen  
And shape of beauty that has been,  
Fair histories of heroic times  
Gone by and tales from poets' rhymes ;  
But now alas ! the radiant spright  
Had from the webwork taken flight,  
And of their braveries there was left  
Only a grey and filmy weft  
Of shadowy outlines, toss'd about  
By the sad airs, like some still rout  
Of oldworld spectres.

And anon,  
As I went on and ever on  
Betwixt the arras all wind-blown,  
Pale shadows of old feasts were thrown  
Across the many vistaed ways,  
And banner'd pageants did blaze  
And wind along the weed-weft aisles :  
Anon ghost-music rose the whiles,—  
Rhythms of erst-glad melody,

Measures, whose soul had been of old  
A summer-dream of blue and gold,  
But now was paled and blanched to be  
Void wails of sorrow unconsoled  
And voices of a vague remorse.

And often, as upon the course  
Of the fair shade, I took my way,  
There started spectres from the grey  
Of the pale halls and hemm'd me round  
With shadow-dances. From the ground  
The memories of things gone by  
Aspired before me endlessly,  
And all the passion of the past  
Rose up around me, wan and ghastr  
With the long death-swoon, and did mock  
My forward longing with a flock  
Of jeering phantoms, mute as Fate.

In every nook the ghosts did wait  
To spring out on me : from the roofs,  
Thick with void ghosts of gems, grey woofs  
Of worldly-worn desires did flutter  
About my head, and there did mutter  
From all the caves of echoings  
A ceaseless flight of murmurous things,  
Wing'd with dead thoughts melodious.

The phantom footfalls did arouse,

As we swept on, a shadow-burst  
Of my waste song-shapes, interspersed  
With bleeding semblants of the souls  
I had outwrought from my own doles  
And joys and vested in a part  
Of flesh torn from my bleeding heart.

These all from silence started out  
To life and circled me about  
With an unceasing rout of ghosts :  
And evermore new shadow-hosts  
Grew from the mystic gloom, array'd  
In trails of shadowy raiment, made  
Of all my bygone hopes and fears.

And still, as I did fare, for tears  
And weariness nigh past desire,  
That lovely shade to me drew nigher  
And with soft eyes and finger-sign  
Beckon'd me on.

Strange lights did shine  
Through vault and cloister, and anon  
A phosphorescence, blue and wan,  
Shimmering across the shadow-steads,  
Show'd where great giants raised their heads  
Of shadow to the middle air :  
And kings and heroes, very fair  
And dreadful, sat in ghostly state

Upon vast thrones, stern shapes of Fate,  
More awful than a man shall tell,  
Majestic and immoveable.

Now on a cloister'd space we came,  
Where, like pale pyramids of flame,  
Strove up to heaven the shining weeds  
Of all most bright and noble deeds  
That men have done or dream'd to do ;  
And in the cloisters, stretching through  
From hall to hall, on either hand,  
Dim luminous semblances did stand ;  
And round the cornice, like a frieze,  
Were shadow'd out all phantasies,  
Gracious and awful, that on earth  
The thought of man has given birth  
Or dream-built harmony unto,  
Death-paled from all their wealth of hue  
And all the passion of their youth.

And as I pass'd them by, the ruth  
That did possess me at their view  
Took shape within me, and I knew  
In all that grey and shadowy state  
Of dreams and semblants etiolate,  
The phantoms of the unreal sheen,  
That glorifies the " Might have been."

Long did we traverse without cease

That awful maze of palaces,  
And still, whene'er my soul did faint  
For the sad stress of some dead plaint,  
The ghost of gladness past, or pale  
With agony, desire did fail  
For all the horror of the task  
And the grey terror of that masque  
Of shadowy spectres, that for aye  
Did harass me with memory  
And ghosts of thought,—that fairest shade  
The torment of my spright allay'd  
With her soft shadowy azure gaze,  
And still I strove along the ways  
Behind her and could reach her not.

So we for endless years, methought,  
Did fare, and never could I win  
To fold her form my arms within ;  
It seem'd to me, the films of air,  
That parted us, of crystal were,  
As pitiless as diamond,  
Forbidding me to come beyond  
The line that did our lives divide.

And ever, as the ages died  
And no hope came to my desire  
Of its fruition, the pale fire  
Of longing, that at first had seem'd  
But as a flicker, burn'd and beam'd



Within my soul to such a height  
Of aspirance, that with its light  
My ghostly semblance, grey and wan,  
Grew glorious as a star and shone  
With splendour of desireful love,  
And all my being flamed above  
The greyness of the lower air.  
And that shade, too, the pale and fair,  
Put on like splendour of desire,  
And in like brightness ever higher  
Flamed up athwart the shadow-rout  
And the pale cloisters, sheathed about  
With fire celestial.

So there past  
Long centuries, until at last  
My eyes were open'd from the ring  
Of my own wish and suffering,  
And to my new-born sight appear'd,  
Against the sky-rack grey and weird,  
Myriads of souls, that like a fire  
Burnt higher up and ever higher  
Towards the troubled firmament.  
And as I gazed, the air was rent  
With a great singing, as it were  
The resonance of a great prayer  
And joy for a great ransom won ;  
And with the shock of it upon  
The embattled air, the veils were torn

From the ceiled sky, and there was born  
Unto my sense a great delight,  
A flowering of awful light :  
For there did pass across the heaven  
A sword of flaming gold, and riven  
Were all the glooms from south to north  
And the great radiance burst forth  
Of midmost heaven upon us all,  
And from the canopy did fall  
A rain of heavenly fires, that brake  
The crystal walls from us and strake  
The mists to splendour.

Then did we

Each upon each in ecstasy  
Rush in the ending of desire,  
And in that sacrament of fire,  
All grossness of vain hope fell off  
From the pure essence, and with love  
And gladness purged, the perfect spright  
Rose up into the realms of light,  
Death and its mystery solved at last.

And so with many a song we past  
Into the deepest deeps of blue,  
A dual soul, that like a dew  
Dissolved into the Eternity  
That rounds all Being like a sea.



THE RIME OF REDEMPTION.



“Traditur etiam nonnullos vire pervincente amoris ipsum  
contra summum Domini iudicium prævaluisse.”

*Euseb. de Fid. rebus Epist.*

“Some indeed are said to have by very conquering force  
of love prevailed against the supreme judgment of God.”



## THE RIME OF REDEMPTION.

I.



HE ways are white in the moon's light,  
Under the leafless trees ;  
Strange shadows go across the snow  
Before the tossing breeze.

The night, meseems, is full of dreams,  
Ghosts of the bygone time :  
Full many a sprite doth walk to-night  
Over the soundless rime.

The burg stands grim upon the rim  
Of the low wooded hill :  
Sir Loibich sits beside the hearth,  
Fill'd with a thought of ill.

The fire-light glows across the snows,  
In the black night defined :  
The cresset-fire flares high and higher,  
Toss'd by the raging wind.

The knight sits bent with eyes intent  
Upon the dying fire ;  
Sad dreams and strange in sooth do range  
Before the troubled sire.

He sees the maid the past years laid  
Upon his breast to sleep,  
Long dead in sin, laid low within  
The grave unblest and deep.

He sees her tears, her sobs he hears,  
Borne on the shrieking wind ;  
He sees her hair, so golden-fair,  
Stream out her form behind.

He hears her wail, with lips that fail,  
To him to save her soul ;  
He sees her laid, unhouselèd,  
Under the crossless knoll.

His heart is wrung, his soul is stung  
To death with memories :  
His face grows white as the moonlight,  
And all his words are sighs.

## II.

“ Ah ! would, dear Christ, my tears sufficed  
To ransom her !” he cries :

“ Sweet Heaven, to win her back from sin,  
I would renounce the skies.

“ Could I but bring her suffering  
To pardon and to peace,  
I for my own sin would atone,  
Where never pain doth cease !

“ I for my part would gnaw my heart,  
Chain'd in the flames of hell ;  
I would abide, unterrified,  
More than a man shall tell.”

The flame burns red, he bows his head  
Upon his joining hands ;  
The wraiths of old are shown and told  
Upon the dying brands.

## III.

A hoarse scream tears athwart his ears,  
Strange howls are in the air ;  
The wolves do stray in search of prey  
Across the moorlands bare.

Red eyes flame forth from south to north,  
The beasts are all a-chase ;  
God help the wight that goes to-night  
Among the wild wood ways !

## IV.

The moon is pale, the night winds wail,  
Weird whispers fill the night :  
“ Dear heart, what word was that I heard  
Ring out in the moonlight ?

“ Methought there came to me my name,  
Cried with a wail of woe ;  
A voice whose tone my heart had known  
In the days long ago.”

’Twas but the blast that hurried past,  
Shrieking among the pines ;  
The souls that wail upon the gale,  
When the dim starlight shines.

## V.

“ Great God ! the name ! once more it came  
Ringing across the dark !  
Loibich !” it cried. The night is wide,  
The dim pines stand and hark.



The lead-grey heaven by the blast is riven ;  
God ! how the torn trees shriek !  
The wild wind soughs among the boughs,  
As though the dead did speak.

## VI.

“ Loibich ! Loibich ! my soul is sick  
With hungering for thee !  
The night fades fast, the hours fly past ;  
Stay not, come forth to me ! ”

Great Heaven ! the doubt is faded out,  
It was her voice that spake ;  
He made one stride and open wide  
The casement tall he strake.

The cloudwrack grey did break away,  
Out shone the ghostly moon ;  
Down slid the haze from off the ways  
Before her silver shoon.

Pale silver-ray'd, out shone the glade,  
Before the castle wall,  
And on the lea the knight could see  
A maid both fair and tall.

Gold was her hair, her face was fair,  
As fair as fair can be ;  
But through the night the blue corpse-light  
About her could he see.

She raised her face towards the place  
Where Loibich stood adread ;  
There was a sheen in her two een,  
As one that long is dead.

She look'd at him in the light dim,  
And beckon'd with her hand :  
“ Dear Knight,” she said, “ thy prayer hath sped  
Unto the heavenly land.”

“ Come forth with me : the night is free  
For us to work the thing  
That is to do, before we two  
Shall hear the dawn-bird sing.”

## VII.

He took his brand within his hand,  
His dirk upon his thigh :  
And he hath come, through dusk and gloom,  
Where wide the portals lie.

“ Saddle thy steed, Sir Knight, with speed,  
Thy faithfullest,” quoth she,  
“ For many a tide we twain must ride  
Before the end shall be.”

The steed is girt, black Dagobert,  
Swift-footed as the wind ;  
The knight leapt up upon his croup,  
The maid sprang up behind.

A stately pair the steed doth bear  
Upon his back to-night :  
The sweatdrops rain from flank and mane,  
His eyes start out for fright.

Her weight did lack upon his back ;  
He trembled as he stood ;  
It seem'd as 'twere a death-cold air  
Did freeze the courser's blood.

She threw the charms of her white arms  
About Sir Loibich's neck :  
It seem'd as if 't had been a drift  
Of snow on him did break.



## VIII.

The spurs are dyed deep in the side  
Of the destrere amain ;  
The leaves do chase behind his race  
And far out streams his mane.

The wind screams past ; they ride so fast,—  
Like troops of souls in pain  
The snowdrifts spin, but none may win  
To rest upon the twain.

So fast they ride, the blasts divide  
To let them hurry on ;  
The wandering ghosts troop past in hosts  
Across the moonlight wan.

They fly across the frozen floss,  
Across the frost-starr'd mead :  
Hill, wood and plain they cross amain ;  
Hill, plain and wood succeed.

## IX.

The wild wind drops, the snow-whirl stops,  
Frost fades from grass and brere ;  
The dim clouds die from out the sky  
And forth the moon shines clear.

A sudden hush, and then a rush  
Of magic melodies ;  
A summer wood, with moonpearls strew'd,  
And jasmine-girdled trees.

The lady laid her hand of shade  
Upon the hurrying horse,  
And suddenly, upon the lea,  
He halted in his course.

To them there came a fragrant flame,  
A light of elfinry :  
The haggard night pour'd forth delight  
And flowers of Faërie.

A wondrous song did wind along  
The moon-besilver'd glades,—  
And all the things the elfnight brings  
Did glitter from the shades.

## x.

“ Light down, Sir Knight, in the moonlight,—  
Light down and loose my hand ;  
I must be gone,—but thou hast won  
Unto the Faery land.”

“ By Christ His troth !” he swore an oath,  
“ No Faery land for me,  
Unless thou light thee down to-night,  
Therein with me to be.”

“ Alas, Sir Knight, I must this night  
Harbour me far away ;  
Far be't from thee to rest with me  
Where I must dwell for aye.”

He smote his breast : “ By Christ His rest,  
No Faeryland will I !  
Rather to dwell with thee in hell  
Than lonely in the sky !”

The thunder broke, the lightning stroke  
Fell down and tore the earth ;  
The firm ground shook, as though there took  
The world the throes of birth.

The elfsong died, the moon did hide  
Her face behind the haze,  
And once again they ride amain  
Across the wild wide ways.

## XI.

The night grew black ; the grey cloudwrack  
Whirl'd fast across the skies ;  
What lights are those the white snow throws  
Reflected in their eyes ?

What flames are those the blackness shows  
Rising like rosy flowers  
Up to the lift ? What ruddy rift  
Shines out in the night hours ?

The night is wide : they ride and ride,  
The lights grow bright and near ;  
There comes a wail upon the gale,  
And eke a descant clear.

There comes a plain of souls in pain,  
And eke a high sweet song  
As of some fate whose pain is great,  
But yet whose hope is strong.

Aye louder grow the sounds of woe,  
But the song sweeter still,  
Until the steed doth slacken speed,  
At foot of a high hill.

The hazes grey before their way  
Divided are in two ;  
A wondrous sight midmost the night  
Lies open to their view.

The hill is strewn beneath the moon  
With strange and singing fires ;  
In every flame a soul from shame  
And soil of sin aspires.

From every fire, higher and higher  
The song of hope doth rise :  
These are the sprights that God delights  
To fit for Paradise.

## XII.

“ Light down, Sir Knight ; I pray, alight ;  
This is the purging-place ;  
Here shalt thou win to cast off sin  
And come to Christ His grace.”

“ By Christ His troth ! ” he swore an oath,  
“ That will I not,” quoth he,  
“ Unless thou too, my lover true,  
Therein shalt purgèd be.”



“Would God,” she said, “the lot were laid  
For me to enter here !

Alack ! my stead is with the dead,  
All in the place of fear ;

“ But thou light down ; the gate is thrown  
Wide open in the ward ;

See where they stand on either hand,  
Angels with downdropt sword.”

“ By Christ His rest !” he smote his breast ;

“ No grace of God will I !  
Rather with thee damnèd to be  
Than lonely in the sky !”

The night closed round, there came a sound  
Of trumpets in the air ;

The steed leapt on, the fires were gone,  
And on the twain did fare.

## XIII.

Through storm and night again their flight  
They urge o'er hill and plain :

What sounds smite clear upon the ear,  
Through dusk and wind and rain ?

“ Meseems I heard as if there stir’d  
A sound of golden lyres ;  
Methought there came a sweet acclaim  
Of trumpets and of choirs.

“ So sing the saints, where never faints  
The sunlight from the skies ;  
So pulse the lyres among the choirs  
Of God in Paradise.”

## XIV.

A singing light did cleave the night,  
High up a hill rode they ;  
The veils of Heaven for them were riven,  
And all the skies pour’d day.

The golden gate did stand await,  
The golden town did lie  
Before their sight, the realms of light  
God builded in the sky.

The steed did wait before the gate,  
Sheer up the street look’d they,  
They saw the bliss in Heaven that is,  
They saw the saints’ array.

They saw the hosts upon the coasts  
Of the clear crystal sea ;  
They saw the blest, that in the rest  
Of Christ for ever be.

The choirs of God pulsed full and broad  
Upon the ravish'd twain ;  
The angels' feet upon the street  
Rang out like golden rain.

They felt the sea of ecstasy  
That flows about the throne ;  
The bliss of heaven to them was given  
Awhile to look upon.

## xv.

Then said the maid, " Be not afraid,  
God giveth heaven to thee ;  
Light down and rest with Christ His blest,  
And think no more of me !"

Sir Loibich gazed, as one sore dazed,  
Awhile upon the place ;  
Then, with a sigh, he turn'd his eye  
Upon the maiden's face.

“ By Christ His troth !” he swore an oath,  
“ No heaven for me shall be,  
Unless God give that thou shalt live  
In heaven for aye with me.”

“ Ah, curst am I !” the maid did cry ;  
“ My place thou knowest well ;  
I must begone before the dawn,  
To harbour me in hell.”

“ By Christ His rest !” he beat his breast,  
“ Then be it even so ;  
With thee in hell I choose to dwell  
And share with thee thy woe !

“ Thy sin was mine,—By Christ His wine,  
Mine too shall be thy doom ;  
What part have I within the sky,  
And thou in Hell’s red gloom ?”

The vision broke, as thus he spoke,  
The city waned away :  
O’er hill and brake, o’er wood and lake  
Once more the darkness lay.

## XVI.

O'er hill and plain they ride again,  
Under the night's black spell,  
Until there rise against the skies  
The lurid lights of hell.

The plain is wide: they ride and ride,  
The air with smoke grows crost,  
And through the dark their ears may hark  
The roaring of the lost.

The dreadful cries they rend the skies,  
The plain is ceil'd with fire:  
The flames burst out, around, about,  
The heats of hell draw nigher.

Unfear'd they ride; against the side  
Of the red flameful sky  
Grim forms are thrown, strange shapes upgrown  
From out Hell's treasury.

Black grisly shapes of demon apes,  
Grim human-headed snakes,  
Red creeping things with scaly wings,  
Born of the sulphur lakes.

The flames swell up out of the cup  
Of endless agony,  
And with the wind there comes entwined  
An awful psalmody ;

The hymning sound of fiends around,  
Rejoicing in their doom,  
The fearsome glee of things that be  
Glad in their native gloom.

## XVII.

Fast rode the twain across the plain,  
With hearts all undismay'd,  
Until they came where all a-flame  
Hell's gates were open laid.

The awful stead gaped wide and red,  
To gulph them in its womb :  
There could they see the fiery sea  
And all the souls in doom.

There came a breath, like living death,  
Out of the gated way :  
It scorch'd his face with its embrace,  
It turn'd his hair to grey.

## XVIII.

Then said the maid, " Art not dismay'd?  
Here is our course fulfill'd :  
Wilt thou not turn, nor rest to burn  
With me, as God hath will'd ?

" By`Christ His troth ! " he swore an oath,  
Thy doom with thee dree I !  
Here will we dwell, hand-link'd in hell,  
Unseverèd for aye ! "

He spurr'd his steed ; the gates of dread  
Gaped open for his course :  
Sudden outrang a trumpet's clang,  
And backwards fell the horse.

The ghostly maid did wane and fade,  
The lights of hell did flee ;  
Alone in night the mazèd wight  
Stood on the frozen lea.

## XIX.

Out shone the moon ; the mists were blown  
Away before his sight,  
And through the dark he saw a spark,  
A welcoming of light.

Thither he fared, with falchion bared,  
Toward the friendly shine ;  
Eftsoon he came to where a flame  
Did burn within a shrine.

A candle stood before the Rood,  
Christ carven on the tree :  
Despite the shrine, there was no sign  
Of man that he could see.

Down on his knee low louted he  
Before the cross of wood,  
And for her spright he saw that night  
Long pray'd he to the Rood.

And as he pray'd, with heart down-weigh'd,  
A wondrous thing befell :  
He saw a light, and through the night  
There rang a silver bell.

The earth-mists drew from off his view,  
He saw God's golden town ;  
He saw the street, he saw the seat  
From whence God looketh down.

He saw the gate transfigure,—  
He saw the street of pearl,  
And in the throng, the saints among,  
He saw a gold-hair'd girl.



He saw a girl as white as pearl,  
With hair as red as gold :  
He saw her stand among the band  
Of angels manifold.

He heard her smite the harp's delight,  
Singing most joyfully,  
And knew his love prevail'd above  
Judgment and destiny.

\* \* \* \* \*

## XX.

Gone is the night, the morn breaks white  
Across the eastward hill ;  
The knightly sire by the dead fire  
Sits in the dawning chill.

By the hearth white, there sits the knight,  
Dead as the sunken fire ;  
But on his face is writ the grace  
Of his fulfill'd desire.







THE BUILDING OF THE  
DREAM.



“ Or quester est de telle sorte et ordinance qu’à onc homme ayant mis main ès choses du monde des enchantemens et cuydant de puy d’eulx se departir et se retourner à la vie de dessous les astres point ne luy sera licite ne fesable mais force luy sera hors de ce monde au plus tost mourir.”

JEHAN DU MESTRE,  
*De reg. incant.*



## THE BUILDING OF THE DREAM.


*O Love, that never pardoneth,  
O Love, more pitiless than Death!  
His strife is vain that would express  
Thy sweets without thy bitterness!*

*His toil is vain, for sooth it is  
One winneth Love through Death his kiss;  
A man shall never know Love's land  
Until Death take him by the hand.*

*O bitter Love! this is indeed  
The evil unto life decreed,  
That men shall seek thee wearily,  
And finding thee, shall surely die!*

### I.

#### DESIRE.

 HERE dwelt a squire in Poitou of old  
times,  
Under the fragrant limes  
That fringed a city very fair and wide,  
Set on a green hill-side;  
And round about the city there did go,  
Murmuring soft and low

Sweet half heard melodies of days gone by,  
A river that did lie  
Upon the woven greensward of the fields  
In pools like silver shields  
Of mighty giants flung upon the grass,  
And round the walls did pass  
And kiss'd the grey old ramparts of the place  
With the enchanted grace  
Of its fair crystal shallows, in the morn  
Flush'd silver as the thorn  
Of a May-dawning, and when day was done,  
Rose-ruddy with the sun,  
That fill'd the arteries of the land with gold.

Fair was the place and old  
Beyond the memory of man, with roofs  
Tall-peak'd and hung with woofs  
Of dainty stone-work, jewell'd with the grace  
Of casements, in the face  
Of the white gables inlaid, in all hues  
Of lovely reds and blues.  
At every corner of the winding ways  
A carven saint did gaze,  
With mild sweet eyes, upon the quiet town,  
From niche and shrine of brown ;  
And many an angel, graven for a charm  
To save the folk from harm  
Of evil sprites, stood sentinel above  
High pinnacle and roof.

The place seem'd sanctified by quietude,  
With some quaint peace imbued,  
And down its streets the sloping sunlight leant  
On roof and battlement,  
Like a God's blessing, loath to pass away,  
Lingering beyond the day.

But seldom came the pomp and blazonry  
Of clamorous war anigh  
The calm sweet place ; but there folk came to  
spend  
The days of their life's end  
In strifeless quiet, in the tender haze  
Of the old knightly days,  
That bathed the place in legend and romance.  
Haply, bytimes, a lance  
Would glitter in the sun, as down the street  
The mailed knights rode to meet  
The armies of the king of all the land,  
And with loud-clanging brand  
And noise of many a clarion and a horn,  
The bannerets were borne  
Before them by their men-at-arms : but yet  
The place was unbeset  
By actual war, and men look'd lazily  
Across the plains, to see  
The far-off dust-clouds, speck'd with points of light,  
That told of coming fight  
In the dim distance, where the fighting-men

Trail'd, through some distant glen  
Or round the crown of some high-crested hill,  
Halberd and spear and bill,  
And to the walls the echoed sound would come  
Of some great army's hum  
And clank of harness, mix'd with trumpet-clang.  
And now and then there rang  
At the shut gates a silver clarion's call,  
And the raised bridge would fall  
To give some knight night's lodging there, who  
went  
To a great tournament  
Or act of arms in some far distant town  
Beyond the purpled brown  
Of the great hills.

But else the quiet place  
Slept in a lazy grace  
Of old romance and felt the stress and need  
Little in very deed  
Of the great world, that compass'd it about  
With many a woe and doubt  
Unknown to it. Yea, for the quietness  
And peace that did possess  
The town, had many a learned clerk, that sought  
Deep in the realms of thought,  
Made to himself a home within the walls ;  
Among the ancient halls  
Wrought many a linner, famous in the land,



And many an one with hand  
Well skill'd to sweep the lute-strings to delight,  
And crafty men that write  
Fair books and fill the marge with painted things,  
Gold shapes of queens and kings,  
Fair virgins sitting in bird-haunted bowers,  
And every weed that flowers  
From spring through summer to the waning  
year,—  
Here without let or fear  
These all did dwell and wrought at arts of peace.

And there, too, dwelt at ease  
This squire of Poitou. Ebhardt was his name ;  
A name not strange to fame  
In the old days, when he was wont to bear  
Banner and banner'd spear  
Before great knights and rend the thickest press  
Of foemen with the stress  
Of his hot youth. Of old, in very deed,  
There once had been much rede  
Of his fair prowess and the deeds of arms  
He wrought with his stout arms  
Upon the enemies of land and king ;  
And of a truth, no thing  
Was wanting to the squire but yet one field  
Of fight, ere on his shield  
The glorious blazon of a knight should shine,  
Before the golden sign

Of chivalry should glance at either heel  
 And the ennobling steel  
 Fall softly on his shoulder.

But that day

Was long since past away  
 Out of his thought, and all the old desire  
 Had faded from the squire  
 Of golden spurs and every knightly thing.  
 For, as the years did bring  
 The winterward of life, and age began  
 To creep upon the man,  
 Came weariness of strife and wish for rest  
 And thought that peace was best  
 For those whose youth had left them and the first  
 Fresh heat of blood, that burst  
 All bounds and barriers of rugged Fate.  
 Wherefore he did abate  
 His warlike toil, and after many a day  
 He had wholly away  
 From the grim strife and clangour of the time  
 Withdrawn himself, in prime  
 Of later manhood, and in arts of peace  
 Thenceforward without cease  
 His mind had vantaged. And, in chief, such  
 quests  
 As the old alchemists  
 And nigromancers sought, himself he set  
 To follow, and forget

The ills of living, seeking in old tomes,  
    Heap'd up within the glooms  
Of scholars' shelves for many a dusty year,  
    To find the words that bear  
The secret of the mysteries of life  
    And all the problems rife  
In changeful being, that for aye anew  
    Unto the sage do sue  
For due solution. Many a year he wrought  
    At these dim quests, and sought—  
Chiefest of all the hidden things that lie  
    And mock men's fantasy  
In the recesses of forbidden arts—  
    The mystic lore that parts  
The soul of man from grinding cares of earth,  
    And with a new bright birth  
More blessèd than the angels maketh him,  
    And had upon the brim  
Of the strange knowledge trembled many a time,  
    Yet back into the slime  
Of the old state fell ever, missing aye  
    The thing he came so nigh  
By some hair's-breadth of crystal pitiless,  
    That against all his stress  
Avail'd to stop his passing heavenward.

So, many a year he pour'd  
His strength into the sieve of that strange task,  
As in a Danaïd's cask,

And failing ever, ever hoped anew,  
    And ever did ensue  
Upon the well-worn path he loved so well—  
    Until, one day, it fell  
That, studying in an ancient book—fair writ  
    With chymic inks that bit  
Into the pictured vellum of the page  
    So deeply that with age  
The words fail'd scarcely, bound with many a hasp  
    And quaintly-graven clasp  
Of gold and tarnish'd silver,—by some chance  
    Of favouring Fate, his glance,  
That had been wandering dull and listlessly  
    Amid a prosy sea  
Of ancient saws and schoolmen's verbiage,  
    Lit on a close-writ page,  
Whose very aspect made his heart to leap  
    With some strange stirring.

Deep

And long he search'd the scroll, till on a space  
    Left wide betwixt the grace  
Of woven flowers and goldwork, that the rim  
    Of the fair script did limn  
With such bright broidery of lovely hues,  
    As ancient folk did use  
To beautify their pleasant books withal,  
    He read a rescript, all  
In twisted Greek, contracted to such maze

Of crabbèd Proclus-ways,  
That with much labour hardly could he win  
To find the sense within  
The gnarl'd, rude characters. But well repaid  
For all the toil he laid  
To the deciphering, in truth, he was ;  
For so it came to pass  
That as the meaning, veil'd at first and dim,  
Grew visible to him  
More and more certainly, the squire was ware  
That in the scroll a rare  
And precious secret of the craft lay hid,  
Cunningly set amid  
A maze of devious words, that, save to one  
Long-learn'd and grey-hair'd grown  
In all the occult arts, must lead the wit  
Wandering astray from it  
Among void fancies. But the squire had spent  
Long years in study, bent  
Over such books, and so was skill'd in all  
Devices wherewithal  
The ancient masters sought their pearls to hide  
From such profane as tried  
To fathom their strange mysteries, and keep  
Their wisdom dim and deep  
For those alone that of the craftship were ;  
And so, with toil and care,  
After much labour from the scroll he learn'd  
The thing for which he yearn'd

So many fruitless years ; the charm that frees  
The soul from miseries  
And joys of life : for it therein was told  
That, if with virgin gold  
Won with his sweat and beaten into shoon,  
Under the risen moon,  
With his own hands, a man should shoe his horse,  
And, braced for a great course,  
Should fearless ride into the couchant sun,—  
Before seven days were done,  
He of a truth should come unto a place,  
Where, with unearthly grace  
And ravishment, the dreams of his dead youth,  
In all their lovely sooth  
Beyond imagining, should be upbuilt  
Before his eyes, and gilt  
With all the gold and pearls and flowers that be  
Within man's fantasy ;  
And there it should be given him to dwell  
For ever, 'neath the spell  
Of that unchanging magic of his thought,  
Wherein no thing unsought  
For lack of his imagining should fail,  
Nor any note of wail  
Nor hum of weary toil should enter there,  
But in the restful air .  
Life should be painless under dream-blue skies,  
Gilt by the radiant eyes  
Of that fair queen, that all in dreams do love,

Set in the realms above  
Our reach, as Dante loved his Beatrice.—  
And lovelier things than this,  
Ay, and more wondrous, were recounted there  
Of how that place was fair  
And bright beyond man's thought of earthly bliss.

So, little strange it is  
If Ehardt, reading of the things set down  
Upon the vellum, brown  
With age, of that old book, grew wonder-glad,  
And for a little had  
Scarce senses to receive the words he read  
And all the goodlihead  
Of promise, that the faithful scroll had held  
So many a year enspell'd  
From all but him the master and adept.  
Hot tears of joy he wept  
To think there was to him, of all his kind,  
Alone such bliss assign'd ;  
And presently began his thoughts to set  
Awork how he should get  
This thing he yearn'd for : for the man was poor  
And hardly could procure  
Fit sustenance. In study had he spent  
His substance, being bent  
On his strange hopes past thought of worldly gain.  
And as he rack'd his brain,  
Awhile all fruitlessly, for means whereby

He should make shift to buy  
 The needed metal, that came nigh to be  
     The price of a squire's fee,  
 He suddenly bethought him that there yet,  
     Uncharged by any debt,  
 Remain'd to him one little piece of land,  
     Fruitful enough and spann'd  
 By the swift Loire ; a little vine-set field  
     Whose fertile soil did yield  
 A dole of daily substance, scant enough  
     For all save those that plough  
 The fields of knowledge ; earnt as the reward  
     Of his young blood outpour'd  
 On many a foughten field of sunny France ;  
     Which, being sold, perchance  
 Might, with some curious arms he once had gain'd,  
     Whileares when Fortune deign'd  
 To favour him against his foe in fight,  
     Fulfil the sum aright  
 He needed to possess the thing he sought.

But if (O woful thought !)  
 His substance being wasted in this wise,  
     His glorious enterprise  
 Should fail, for all his hopes and effort ?

Why,

What could he do but die ?  
 And to a fighter, death was terrorless.  
 While, if the Fates should bless



His long desire with the fulfill'd delight,  
Would not his soul be quite  
Absolved from life and its ignoble need,  
Seeing that he should feed  
On the fair food of an unearthly bliss,  
And with his love's best kiss  
And in her sight from all the weary dearth  
And stressfulness of earth  
Be purified ?

So either hap might chance,  
Ill or deliverance,  
And in no wise should he have need again  
Of that unlovely bane  
Of our dull lives, that is our curse and stay,  
Without which is no way  
To live nor with it to live happily.

Wherefore his land sold he  
And all his arms, except one suit of mail  
Wrought out with many a scale  
And ring of steel, and his good sword and spear  
And all the warlike gear  
He had erst ridden to the battle in,  
With age and use full thin  
And rusty grown, but still of temper keen  
And faithful, having been  
A right good armourer's work of middle Spain—  
And with the double gain  
He bought a lump of virgin gold as large

As a Moor's battle-targe,  
Wherewith to work the magic that he learnt  
Within the scroll.

There burnt  
Within his breast so uncontroll'd a fire  
And urgency of desire  
To fill the measure of his high intent,  
That scarce the day was spent  
Whereon he bought the gold, and in the sky  
The moon was white and high,  
Ere to the rooftop of his house he crept,  
And there, whilst all folk slept,  
In the full ripple of the flooding light,  
Did work the livelong night,  
To fashion out the ore with his own hands  
Into smooth beaten bands  
Of wroughten gold, moulding them circle-wise  
Into such shape and guise  
As for the seven days' journey should be meet  
To guard his horse's feet  
Against the highway's stones. The work did  
grow  
Beneath his hands full slow  
And tediously ; for many a year was past  
Since he had labour'd last  
At such smith's craft ; but yet the earnest will  
Redeem'd the want of skill,  
And with much toil at last the squire did make

The stubborn gold to take  
Shoe-shape.

All night he wrought beneath the moon,  
And with the dawn the shoon  
Fourfold were finish'd, round beyond impeach,  
Pierced with four holes in each ;  
Nor, for the fitting, to each hole did fail  
The needful golden nail  
To clasp the circlet through the holes fourfold.  
And so it chanced the gold  
Was wholly spent to the last glittering grain,  
Nor did a speck remain  
Of the thick ore when the last nail was wrought ;  
Wherefore Squire Ebhardt thought  
The omen fair, and braced his heart with it.

Then as the night did flit  
Across the hilltops in the van of morn,  
And the pale lights were born  
That in the dawn do herald the young day,  
Streaking the cheerless grey  
Of heaven with their rose and opal woof,—  
Descending from the roof,  
Before the daybreak, hastily he clad  
The harness that he had  
Yet left to him, upon his sturdy breast,  
And in his morion's crest  
Placed the red plume he had been wont to wear

In the old days, once fair  
And flaunting scarlet, but now faded sore.

Then did he strike the four  
Worn shoes of iron from his horse's feet,  
And in their stead the meet  
Gold circlets clasp'd and beat them firmly on.  
And now the steed must don  
His harness and caparisons of war,  
Such as of old he bore,  
Chanfrein and poitrail with its rusty spike,  
Rerebrace and all the like.

And so,—the twain address in everything  
For knightly venturing  
Needful and meet,—the man bestrode his horse ;  
And on the appointed course  
The old squire sallied forth with his old steed,  
As over hill and mead  
The young day came with slow and timorous feet,  
And the pale air grew sweet  
With the clear dew and the pure early scent  
Of the waked flow'rets, blent  
For incense to the daybreak from the earth ;  
And in the tender birth  
Of morning all things joy'd, and tunes were strong  
Of larks' and linnets' song.

So, riding through the dim white streets, as yet  
Unstirr'd by all the fret

And hum of daily labour, waking all  
The echoes with the fall  
Of his steed's hoofs upon the hilly way,  
He came to where there lay  
Before the gate the guardians of the town,  
Upon the grass thrown down  
To watch the portal, cross'd with many a bar  
And bolt of steel.

## Ajar

The wide leaves stood, whilst sleep possess'd the folk  
So wholly, that the stroke  
Of the squire's horse-hoofs stirr'd their slumbering  
But as a doubtful ring  
Of sound in dreams, nor all his calling roused  
Them anywise, so drowsed  
With sleep they were.—And so he thought to make  
His outward way, nor break  
The warder's wide-mouth'd rest ; but as he strove  
The ancient gate to move  
On its dull flanges, clogg'd with all the rust  
Of many a year, and thrust  
The half-closed, ponderous leaves apart enough  
To give him way, the gruff  
Harsh creaking of the hinge that swung for him,—  
Breaking upon the dim  
Sleep-troubled senses of the folk that lay  
Adream beside the way,—  
With some faint mimic sound of buckler-clang

And foemen's trumpets, rang  
Within the dull dazed channels of their brain,  
    Snapping the slumberous chain  
With which the dream-god held their heavy sense  
    In leaden-limb'd suspense ;  
So that they started up from sleep and saw  
    The squire, that in the raw  
Chill morning dimness pass'd athwart the gate ;  
    And wondering thereat,  
Caught up bright arms and cried to him to stay.  
    But he, upon his way  
Slackening not, faced round upon his seat,  
    That so their eyes might meet  
A visage that they knew ; and they, for friend  
    Recalling him, did wend  
Back to their ward, with many a mutter'd oath,  
    Born of their thwarted sloth,  
'Gainst him that so untimely broke their sleep.

But Ebhardt down the steep  
Of the fair hill rode, all unheeding them,  
    Whilst on the pearlèd hem  
Of the far sky the dim day brighten'd up  
    Into the azure cup  
Of the sweet heaven, that lay on field and hill,  
    All rippleless, until  
Its blue deeps broke upon the purple verge  
    Into a snowy surge  
Of swan-breast cloudlets, laced with palest gold ;

And then the shadows roll'd  
Their mantles round them, and the lingering night  
Fled from the coming light.  
And so uprose the golden-armour'd sun,  
And smote the ridges dun  
Of the deep-bosom'd hills and kindled all  
Their furrows tenebral  
Into a wonderwork of luminous spires,  
Hung with the fretted fires  
Of dawning, and each crest in the pure light  
Grew to a chrysolite  
Of aspiration. On each upland lawn  
Down fell the dewy dawn  
And waked the flowers from their green-folded  
sleep,  
And o'er each verdant steep  
Of sloping greensward swept the sun-chased mist,  
Ruby and amethyst  
With pitiless sweet splendour. Every wood  
With the sweet minstrel brood  
Grew carolful, with here and there, at first  
A note, and then a burst  
Of single song, soon swelling to a sea  
Of choral ecstasy  
And thanks for the young day and the delight  
Of victory o'er the might  
Of darkness ; and each living thing that dwells  
Within the cool wood-dells  
Or in the meadows, to the awakening

Of that sweet day of spring  
Did homage.

So rode Ebhardt onward, through  
The cool sweet tender blue  
Of the fresh springtide dawning, glad at heart,  
Following the rays that part  
The morning sky to westward. By the edge,  
Purple with flower'd sedge,  
Of the clear stream, whose tinkling currents went  
Towards the occident,  
The stout squire fared, through many a thymy field  
With the fresh heaven ceil'd,—  
Crush'd with his horsehoofs many a tender flower,  
That in the sweet dawn hour  
Open'd its gold and azure eyes from dreams  
Of the near June's sunbeams,  
And saw the kine regardant on the grass,  
That aye, as he did pass  
Across the greensward on his destrere true,  
Wet to the hocks with dew,  
Turn'd their slow heads to gaze upon the twain  
Awhile, then back again  
Bent down their muzzles with a lazy grace  
To the rich pasture-place,  
Thickset with flowers and juicy herbs.

And then,—

About the hour when men



Are wont to go to labour, and the light  
    Across the fields grows white  
And large with full mid-morn,—the clear stream pass'd  
    The green sweet fields, and fast  
Among the emerald cloisters of a wood  
    Its farther course pursued,  
Streaking the moss with brown and silver threads  
    And sprinkling the pale beds  
Of primroses and windflowers, white and blue,  
    With its life-giving dew.  
And in the ways the light grew dim again ;  
    But through the leaves, like rain  
Of gold, the sunshine broke and fell in showers  
    Upon the upturn'd flowers,  
Whilst all the birds made carol to the May,  
    Answering the brooklet's lay  
With choral thanks for all the cool sweet rills  
    It brought them from the hills.

And Ebhardt, following the river's way,  
    Rode onward through the day  
Along the fair green lapses of the wood,  
    With many a network strew'd  
Of frolic sunbeams ; and as he did fare,  
    Full often was he ware  
Of peeping hares and velvet-coated deer  
    That fled as he drew near,  
And couchant fawns, upon the bracken set  
    For morning sleep, as yet

Unknowing fear, that with great fearless eyes  
    Did gaze on him, childwise,  
Questioning in themselves what this might be,  
    Clanking in panoply  
Of rust-red mail along the ferny maze  
    Of the cool woodland ways.

The rabbits scamper'd from his horse's feet,  
    As o'er some woodlawn, sweet  
With hyacinths, he pass'd, or down some glen,  
    Purple with cyclamen ;  
And now and then, as through the wood he went,  
    On his strange hopes intent,  
There met him some tann'd woodman, stout and  
    bluff,  
    That with a word of gruff  
Early day-greeting did accost the squire.  
    But else of his desire  
No foreign harshness broke the pleasant spell,  
    Nor on his senses fell  
A human sight or sound ; but all was sweet  
    And silent, as is meet  
For him that dreams in the fair midmost Spring,  
    Amid the birds that sing  
And the fresh flowers that gladden the old world  
    With their pure eyes, impearl'd  
In many a whorl of virginal faint green.

Far wound the way between

The columns of the trees ; and now and then  
Some slope of shallowing glen  
Ceased suddenly upon an open space,  
Where many a fern did lace  
The greensward, and the heather put forth buds,  
And the red sad-eyed studs  
Of pimpurnels did diaper the grass.

Anon the squire did pass  
Betwixt lush hedge-rows, riding on again  
Along some country lane,  
Tangled with briars and the early rose  
And the white weed that blows  
With scented flower-flakes in the flush of May,—  
Whereon the shadows lay  
Of the new-leaféd trees, that over it  
A sun-fleck'd roof did knit  
To ward it from the heat.

Now as he went  
Adown some steep descent,  
Or toil'd along some bridle-path, high hung  
Betwixt thin woods that clung  
Close to the brow of some tall cliff-spur's steep,  
His downward glance would sweep  
Across gold plains and cities thick with men,  
And many a hollow glen,  
Sweet with the blossom'd vines in many a row,  
Toss'd seas of apple-snow

And dropping gold of fire-flowers.

Then again,

As on the open plain  
The pair paced on and felt the sun once more,  
The fragrant breezes bore  
To him the distant hum of men and life,  
And the clear sounds were rife  
In the far distance of the village bells ;  
And on the mossy fells,  
In the blue skymarge, lay within his sight  
Some little town of white,  
With roofs rose-gilded by the flooding sun ;  
For the noon had begun  
To hover over hills and charm the air  
Into the peace most fair  
And stirless of the mid-day. On the wold  
Slumber'd with wings of gold  
The hours, and all things rested. Not a breath  
Told of the late-left death  
Of the sad winter ; but the world was glad,  
As if for aye it had  
The fair possession of the lovely May.

And then again the way  
Wound down into the wood, and from the dells  
Gush'd up the perfumed swells  
Of breath from violets bedded in the moss,  
And many a hare would cross

The sunn'd green pathway with a sunbeam's speed ;  
And still the valiant steed  
Paced on, unslackening.

So went horse and man,  
Until the sun began  
To draw towards the setting, and the west  
Grew glorious on the crest  
Of the dumb hills.

And now the day did fold  
Its mantle of deep gold  
And purple for its death upon the hills,  
And all the pomp, that fills  
The tragedy of sunset with the glow  
Of a king's death, did strow  
The radiant heaven. So down sank the sun,  
And so the day was done ;  
And in the occident the silver horn  
Of the pale moon was borne  
Up in the gold-tinct watchet of the skies,  
And one by one, the eyes  
Of the unsleeping stars were visible  
In the clear purple bell  
Of that great blossom that we mortals name  
God's heaven, and there came  
The hush of sleep upon the lovely land.

The Dream-god went and fann'd  
The air with flower-breathed breezes, and one knew,  
    In the clear sweep of dew,  
The backward wind, that had been wandering o'er  
    The pleasant fresh-flower'd shore,  
And now upon the breast of the dead day  
    Came back to die away  
Into the stillness. Still the west was flush'd,  
    Until the day-birds, hush'd  
By the prone night, gave place to those that hold  
    The even with the gold  
Of their clear grieving song. The nightingale  
    Began to tell the tale  
Of her great poet's sorrow, that is aye  
    New-born and may not die,  
Being too lovely and too sad withal,—  
    For sorrow may not fall  
Into the deeps of comfortable death,  
    As may the Summer's breath  
And the fierce gladness of the July-tide,—  
    And to his plighted bride  
The night-thrush piped, amid the plaited leaves,  
    And every thing that grieves  
Melodiously for the dead day, was fain  
    To fill the air again  
With silver sorrow. So the night fell down,  
    And in her mantle brown  
All weary things address themselves to sleep,  
    And over all, the deep

Sweet silence brooded.

Then the man was tired,  
And eke his steed required  
His natural rest and some scant truss of food.  
So in the middle wood  
The squire dismounted, and with ears attent,  
Sought for some stream that went  
Between the trees ; and speedily the plash  
Of ripples, that did dash  
And gurgle over pebbles, with a note  
Of welcome nearness smote  
Upon his hearing ; and without delay  
He came where in the grey  
Of the moon-coloured mosses, trickled through  
The grass-roots and the rue  
A crystal rill, that in the wavering moon  
Sang up its changeless tune  
To the pale night.

Thither the squire did bring  
His horse ; then, by the spring  
Kneeling, drank deep and long, and looking round,  
Spied fallen on the ground  
Great store of berries from a neighbouring tree.  
Then from the boughs did he  
Gather the fruit, and finding it was meet  
For human food, did eat

A handful of sweet berries, red and brown,—  
And satisfied, lay down  
By his tired horse, that had already laid  
Himself beneath the shade  
Of a great elm, upon the cushion'd moss,  
Crushing the flowers across  
The twisted grass-stalks in the mossy sward,  
For many a fragrant yard,  
Beneath his weight ; for all the earth was strewn  
So thick, beneath the moon,  
With all the Spring-tide heritage and dower  
Of lovely weed and flower,  
One could not tread there but the feet must crush  
Many a sweet flower-flush  
And broidery on the green earth's bridal gown.

So fell the midnight down ;  
And still Squire Ebhardt, by his sleeping horse,  
Thought of the next day's course,  
And for the changeless thought of coming bliss,  
Forgot to woo the kiss  
Of the fair sleep that is all tired men's due.  
But, at the last, the dew  
Of slumber fell upon his heavy lids,  
And the fair God, that bids  
The dreamer to the far enchanted land,  
Laid on his brows a hand  
Of woven moonbeams ; till the thoughts took flight  
Into the brooding night,



And with a smiling face, the sleeper lay  
    And dreamt of many a day  
Long lost behind the glimmering veils of time,  
    And in a golden clime  
Went wandering thro' the dreamlands of his youth,  
    Under the sweet skies' ruth,  
Link'd to his lady.

        So Squire Ebhardt slept,  
    What time the sweet night swept  
Along the silver woodways, and the hours  
    Folded their wings on flowers  
For peace of moonlight, till the moon 'gan fade  
    For break of day, that laid  
Its cold grey hands upon the purple dusk  
    And from the hodden husk  
Of the small hours drew forth the rosy bud  
    Of morning, all a-flood  
With glittering dews : the golden dawn 'gan wake,  
    With many a rosy flake  
And pearl of sungleams flung across the eaves ;  
    And thro' the screen of leaves,  
That overlay the place where Ebhardt slept,  
    The frolic sunlight crept,  
By help of some stray chinks within the woof  
    Of the green luminous roof ;  
And kissing all his face, as there outstretch'd  
    He slumber'd, all enmesh'd

In tangling grass, warn'd him that day was come ;  
And then the awakening hum  
Of the fresh wood and the bright tuneful clang  
Of quiring birds, that sang  
The accueillade of morning, with the gold  
Of the broad sun-glow, told  
His drowsy sense that it was morn again,  
And he too long had lain  
In faineant slumber.

Then did he arise,  
And from his heavy eyes  
Brushing with drowsy hands the dust of sleep,  
Awhile watch'd the light creep  
Along the crests ; then suddenly bethought  
Him of the thing he sought  
And how, if he would come to his desire,  
Before the sun rose higher  
At once upon his forward way he must  
Be fain. And so he thrust  
His sleep from off him, and with gladsome heart  
Addrest him to depart  
Upon his second day of journeying.  
So, stooping to the spring,  
That well'd up through the thyme-roots clear and  
cool,  
He wash'd away the dull  
Gross heaviness of night that lay on him.  
And standing on the brim

Of the brown rippled pool, he call'd his steed,  
That in the neighbouring weed  
Did graze ; and at his call the faithful beast  
Was fain to leave his feast  
And to his side came splashing through the fount,  
In haste. Then did he mount  
Into the saddle without more delay,  
And to find out the way  
He should traverse, a second he did pause  
Half doubtfully, because  
The man with sleep was somewhat dazed nor knew  
At first what path led due  
Towards the setting and the golden west ;  
Then to the realms of rest,  
That lie beyond the day, his face he set,  
And spurr'd his horse.

Not yet

The dew was sun-dried from the pearlèd grass,  
As steed and man did pass  
Along the windings of the forest ways,  
Nor the faint scented haze,  
That hovers in the vaward of the morn,  
Over the flowers, had worn  
Its shimmering webs away, in the sun-glare,  
Into the thin blue air  
That waves unseen between the noontide rays ;—  
For, seven long Spring days



From earliest morning to the couchant sun  
Must Ebhardt ride, nor shun  
The long day's labour,—turning not aside  
For aught that he espied  
Of fair or tempting,—if he would possess  
The yearn'd-for loveliness  
Of his high dreams.

So seven long days he rode  
Along green pass and road,  
From morning-glitter to the even-glome,  
Under the blue sky-dome,—  
Following his dream through many changing lands;  
Now o'er the white sea-sands,  
With horsehoofs splashing through the foamy spray  
That broke across the way,—  
Now passing through the till'd fair fields of men,  
Harkening to lark and wren  
And all the fowls whose kindly use it is  
Folk with the promised bliss  
Of their sweet song, to hearten at their toil,—  
Now riding where the soil  
Blew thick and sweet with roses red and white,  
And with the fair delight  
Of minstrelsy the scented air was weft;  
And whiles within the cleft  
Of many a bare rock and savage hill,

Whose rifts rich gems did fill  
To overflowing, and along whose veins  
The red gold blazed, like stains  
Of sunlight fix'd by some magician's skill.  
Through many a mountain rill  
Swollen to torrents by the young year's rains,  
And over blossom'd plains  
Of heathy moorland, undefiled by feet  
Of weary men, and sweet  
With blowing breezes from the distant sea,—  
Through deeps of greenery  
And dim dumb churches of the giant pines,  
Ranged in sad stately lines,  
Waiting the coming of the Gods to be  
To hail with hymns,—rode he  
Unwearying alway ; whilst the golden shoes  
Each day some part did lose  
Of their soft metal on the pointed stones ;  
For all along the cones  
Of many a mountain range he toil'd, where o'er  
No foot had pass'd before,  
Save that of goat or deer,—through many a reach  
Of grey and shingly beach  
And many a flinty pass ; nor might aside  
Turn from the highway's wide  
Rough band of white, that wound out far away  
Into the dying day,  
To seek the tender greensward of the meads

*THE BUILDING*

That lay beside him. Needs  
Must he endure the utmost of the toil,  
The bitterest of the coil  
Of struggles and of hardships, that abode  
Upon his wishward road.



## II.

## ATTAINMENT.



AND now six days of journeying were  
done,  
And eke the seventh one  
Drew towards the hour when, in the  
middle day

The golden lights do stay  
Their upward travel in the slant blue sky,  
And all the plains do lie  
Asleep beneath the sun. And with the flame  
Of noon, a change there came  
Upon the forward path; for until then  
The squire's advance had lain  
Through plains and woods and countries known to  
man :

But now the road began,  
Upon the nooning of the seventh day,  
To merge into a way  
Strange beyond any that a man could know.

Upon the earth below  
Strange glittering shells and sands of gray were  
    strown,  
    And many a blood-red stone,  
Changeful in colour ; and above, gnarl'd trees  
    Shook with an unfelt breeze ;  
And therein many a shape of dwarf and gnome,  
    Such as, folk say, do roam  
About the dreamland's gates, did climb and cling,  
    Mowing and gibbering  
Like uncouth monstrous apes. On either hand,  
    Gray flowerless plants did stand  
Along the highway's marge, and blood-red bells,  
    Such as for midnight spells  
Thessalian witches pluck : and thereabout  
    Crowded a noiseless rout  
Of gray and shadowy creatures. All the air  
    Was misted with the glare  
Of the curst flowers, and the strange baleful scent  
    That from the herbs was sprent  
As for some ill enchantment : and the things  
    That hover'd there, had wings  
And waver'd dimly over Ebhardt's head,  
    And beckon'd as they sped  
Across his path, striving to draw him off  
    From the highway most rough  
And rude, among the pleasant fields that lay  
    Each side the rugged way,—  
Tempting the man with many-colour'd flowers



And semblants of lush bowers  
Of trellised foliage, set beside the path  
    In many a waving swath  
Of corn and greensward, easeful to behold,—  
    Wooing him in the gold  
Of the rich meadows to lie down and sleep  
    Away, in that green deep  
Of flowers, the weariness of his long ride.

But Ebhardt not aside  
A hair's-breadth turn'd his steed for all their wiles,  
    Nor for the golden smiles  
Of the fair harbours that invited him,  
    Swerved from the highway's rim,  
Clear cut against the far horizon's blaze  
    Of gold, his steadfast gaze ;  
But with a firm-set mouth rode on for aye,  
    Watching the sun now nigh  
To death upon the hills, as one that sees  
    In thought his miseries  
Draw to their term, and for no thing nor power  
    Will, in that fateful hour,  
Draw bridle or be tempted from his road.  
    So ever he abode  
In the due westward path, regarding not  
    The glammers any jot,  
That compass'd him about.

Then those strange things,

That with their blandishings  
And spellwork strove to tempt him to forego  
His long intent, did know  
Their efforts void, and with a doleful cry  
Evanish'd utterly  
Into the twilight and were no more seen.  
And as they fled, the trees  
Grew green again—the grey herbs wither'd off  
And all the sky did doff  
The lurid gloom and hazes that it wore.

But Ebhardt, conning o'er  
The dim-gold landscape and the purple west  
For tokens of his quest,  
E'en as he rode, o'er in his memory turn'd  
The things for which he yearn'd,—  
That of the dreams that had possess'd his youth,  
There might no whit, in sooth,  
Be lost for lack of his remembering :  
And so,—as with swift wing  
His spirit wander'd in the olden ways,  
Searching amid the maze  
Of memories thick-woven in his mind,—  
The hurrying thoughts were twined  
Into the fulness of the old desire ;  
And with the ancient fire  
There grew within the chambers of his brain,  
Unchanged by years and pain,  
The flower-new fantasies of days gone by.

Now was the time to die  
Come for the day, wearied to utterest  
Of life, whenas the west  
Kiss'd its last kiss against the pale sun's lips ;  
And now, as the eclipse  
Of the red light left void the weeping blue  
Of the pale heaven and through  
The woven cloisters of the purpled trees  
The evening-waken'd breeze  
Began to flutter,—upon either hand  
Over the weary land,  
Faint music sounded from the dim sweet woods,  
And the delight that broods  
Over fill'd sleep was sweet upon the squire :  
And all the man's desire  
As 'twere to brim with ecstasy, he heard  
The carol of a bird,  
That sang as it awhile had dwelt among  
The high seraphic throng  
And listen'd to the smitten golden lyres  
Pulsing among the choirs  
Of Paradise, beside the crystal sea,—  
And such an ecstasy  
Of echoes linger'd at its heartstrings still,  
It never could fulfil  
Its bliss with memory of those wondrous hours,  
But to the earthly flowers  
Some snatches of the singing's rise and fall  
Strove ever to recall.

Then in the middle road there rose before  
The squire a mist, that wore  
Strange blazonry of many mingling hues,  
As 'twere the falling dews  
Were curtain'd in a thick and glittering haze  
Across the forward ways ;  
And in the clear sweet hour before the night  
There rose in the twilight  
An arch of glitterance upon the hem  
Of heaven, like a gem  
Built to a rainbow, that 'twixt earth and sky  
Grew higher and more high,  
And as it grew, the colours that it wore  
Shone glorious ever more,  
As if it were the portal of the land  
Of Faerie.

Nigh at hand  
The place beyond that archway of a dream  
Unto the squire did seem,  
And with great joyance through the bended bow,  
That all the earth did strow  
With blending lights of amethyst and gold,  
He rode, thinking to hold  
His dream at once ; but, as he pass'd the verge,  
The mountains seem'd to surge  
In the blue distance like a summer sea,  
And the far sky did flee  
Along the arch. The golden heaven's rim

Grew paler and more dim,  
Receding alway, and the place whereon  
He rode was clad upon  
With a bright sudden growth of magic blooms.—  
Out of the folding glooms  
Of the near dusk rose trail on trail of flowers,  
And arch'd the road with bowers  
Of an unearthly sweetness, marking out  
His way, beyond a doubt,  
Unto his quest : and as he rode along  
The vaulted path, the song  
Of the strange bird more rapturous ever grew,  
Like an enchanted dew  
Of music falling in a silver sea.—  
All over flower and lea  
A new light pass'd, that was not of the sun,  
For all the day was done  
And the dim night held all the lands aswoon,  
Until the hornèd moon  
Should ride pearl-shod across the purple wold.

Then from the rim of gold  
That linger'd still on the horizon's marge,  
A golden blaze grew large  
Of glamorous colour, and within the span  
Of the broad arch began  
To spread and hold the purple of the skies  
And as with all his eyes  
Gazed Ebhardt, wonder-dumb,—against the ground

Of purest gold that crown'd  
The heavens in the ending of the glade,  
There were for him inlaid  
Turrets and battlements, a flowering  
Of every lovely thing.

Along the marge of the sweet sky there rose  
Gold towers and porticoes  
Of burnish'd jasper, ruby cupolas  
And domes high-hung, topaz  
And opal-vaulted; sapphire campanelles  
Held up their flower-blue bells  
Against the gold sky; silver fountain-jets  
Between the minarets  
Threw high their diamond spray, and fretted spires  
Flamed up, like frozen fires  
Of amethyst and beryl, past the height  
Of lofty walls of white,  
Thickset with terraces aflame with flower.—  
Shower upon scented shower,  
The blossoms rain'd from high and bloomy trees,  
Before a scented breeze,  
That fill'd the air with balms and orient gold.  
And on its waftings roll'd  
Across the plains a singing sound of lyres  
Smitten from golden wires,  
And clarion-notes, wide-spreading like a sea  
Under a company  
Of joinèd voices, murmuring softest words

To music like white birds  
Winnowing the foam of some gold Indian bay.  
Lay murmur'd unto lay  
From out that dwelling of a God's delight,  
Following each other's flight  
To greet the dreamer with their blissful stress,  
And pipes and lutes no less  
Yearn'd up to him with strains of welcoming.

And Ebhardt, lingering  
As 'twere before his all-fulfill'd desire,  
Knew all those towers of fire,  
Sun-glancing, and the flower-fleck'd terraces,  
And in the harmonies,  
Wide-winging through the crystal air a gleam  
With gold-flakes, knew his dream,  
As of old times he had pourtray'd the place  
With all its changeful grace  
No moment same, for all the golden dew  
And all the flowers that blew  
And shimmer'd like a noon-mist thereabout.

So with a glad heart, out  
Through the flower-arch he rode and came unto  
The portal, sculptured through  
With pictures of a dream in chrysoprase  
And beryl and a maze  
Of blossoms of the jewel that in one

Is flower and precious stone,  
Being clear hyacinth,—wroughten by no hand  
Of man.

The leaves did stand  
Wide-open for his coming, backward roll'd  
Even to their flange of gold.  
So in he rode and saw the white town spread,  
In all its goodlihead  
Like nothing earthly, very still and wide,  
Upon his either side  
Far-stretching like a vision of the night  
Beyond his further sight.

The place was overrun with flowerage  
Of wondrous blooms that wage  
War with the sun in many an Orient clime :  
Great silver bells did climb  
The gabled turrets with their linking chains,  
Mix'd thick with crimson skeins  
And chalices of sapphire. In the ways  
Gold-paven, rose a maze  
Of trellised porticoes and white dream-steads ;  
And in the mossy beds  
Of the gold flowers, strewn like a rain of stars  
In every court, through bars  
Of gold one saw clear lakelets lay and toy'd  
With the white swans, that joy'd  
To sport in their cool pleasaunce ; and the air



Was tuneful with the fair  
Clear tinkle of the crystal rills that ran  
Across each flowerbed's span  
And fed the grass-roots.

And as down the street  
Rang out the horse's feet,  
Calling strange lovely echoes from their cells,  
Flute-notes and silver bells,  
That broke the silence with a songful spray,  
There ran in the midway  
Unto the man a sudden cloud of girls,  
With breasts like double pearls  
Rose-tinted by long sojourn in the gold  
Of some far Orient, stoled  
But in the waving mantles of their hair :  
Tall maidens, dusk and fair  
With the long gilding kisses of the light,  
Fresh from the fierce delight  
Of plains of golden Ind and Javan seas,  
Shook on the fragrant breeze  
Rich scents from lotus-cups ; and Grecian maids,  
Under their night-black braids  
Cinct with the green acanthus, did advance,  
Link'd in a rhythmic dance :  
Fair girls came, crown'd with white narcissus-stars,  
From rose-strewn plains of Fars ;  
The lithe mild maids of gold Pacific isles  
Brought him their pearly smiles

And olive brows set clear with eyes of black :  
Nor to his sight did lack  
Women with faces of the rosy snow  
Only the west can show,  
In whose fair ivory for double light  
Two tender eyes and bright  
Were set, the colour of the spring-sky's blue  
Hazed with the early dew,—  
And down their shoulders fell a fleece of gold,  
In many a ripple roll'd  
Of sun-imprisoning locks.

And these beside,  
From every portal's wide  
Gaped folds came out into the golden street,  
Eager the man to greet,  
Bright shapes of every radiant eye-delight  
Of lovely women dight  
In pleasant raiment, that a dream can heap  
Up in the aisles of sleep.

Then those fair creatures,—waving like a sea  
Of gold and ebony,  
For all the mazes of their floating hair,—  
Smote the clear jewell'd air  
With songs of triumph and of welcoming ;  
And while their lips did sing,  
Their hands strew'd jasmines in the horse's path,  
And with a scented swath  
Of violet and rose and orange-stars,

Hid every sign of wars  
And toil that cumberèd the valiant steed.

Now in the song indeed,  
And in the varied beauty of the girls,  
Set clear in clustering curls,  
Were easance and delight for any man  
That since the world began  
Loved girls and song and the soft cadenced beat  
Of golden-sandall'd feet  
On thick-strewn flowers; and there might well the  
fire

Of any man's desire  
Be quell'd and satisfied with loveliness  
And all its dreams possess  
In those fair women, with their flowery kiss  
And their descant's clear bliss.  
But Ebhardt cherish'd in his heart—made clear  
By many a weary year  
Of void desire—the memory of a face  
Of an unearthly grace  
And glory, that had smiled on him in dreams,  
Woven, it seem'd, of gleams  
Of pure spring suns and flowers of white moonlight,—  
And for the memory, might  
Have pleasance in no woman save in this,  
That was his Beatrice  
And queen of love.

So all unmoved he went  
By any blandishment  
Of that fair throng, slowly adown the street,  
Hoping his eyes should meet  
Her eyes for whom alone his heartstrings shook.

Then, seeing that the look  
Of yearning died not from the seeker's eyes,  
Circling in bright bird-wise  
The fair crowd broke before his onward route ;  
And from the rest came out  
A maiden, robed in falling folds of green  
And crown'd with jessamine  
And myrtle-snows, that took his bridle-rein  
And led the steed, full fain,  
Along the fragrant carpet of the way,  
Towards a light that lay  
Far in the westward distance like a flame  
Of gold.

Behind them came  
The frolic crowd of girls, following the twain  
With showers of blossom-rain  
And rills of song, until they brought them where  
Pillars of pearl upbare  
A dome of lustrous sapphire, flank'd with spires  
That pierced the sky like fires  
Up-flaming from the golden furnaces  
Of middle earth, 'mid trees  
Ablaze with flowers of gold.

Before the gate

The maiden did abate

Her onward way and bade the squire alight.

Then on the pavement, white

With scented snows, the man sprang lightly down

And with his gauntlet brown

Smote on the golden trellis such a stroke,

That all the echoes woke

Thereto: and therewithal the gold leaves split

In twain and did admit

The sight through archways into many a glade

Of gardens, all outlaid

Beneath the heaven's kisses.

Entering

Therein, the maid did bring

The squire, through many dwellings of delight,

Into a place where light

Lay full and soft a velvet sward athwart.

There in the middle court

Circled with jewell'd cloisters all around,—

Upon the emerald ground

Of gilded mosses broider'd with all flowers

In stories of the hours

That through the spring and summer bear the year

Over the flower-beds clear,—

There was a throne of gold and coral set

With many a goodly fret

Of ivory work, upon the suppliant heads

Of strange fair quadrupeds,  
Most like a lovely lion with girl's eyes,  
Upborne ; and, warder-wise  
Around the throne, stood maidens white as milk,  
Vestured in snowy silk  
Banded with cramozin, and pages fair,  
Clad all in pleasant vair  
And silver, that so thick and numberless  
About the throne did press,  
One might not see the visage of the Crown'd  
That sat thereon.

Around,  
Among the roses and the tulip-beds  
Thick-vein'd with silver threads  
Of tiny trickling rills, fair birds of white  
And red did stalk, and bright  
Peacocks and doves of every lovely hue,  
Golden and green and blue,  
Trail'd jewell'd plumes along the garden-ways  
And with the goodly blaze  
Of their full splendour so did fill the bowers,  
It seem'd all fairest flowers  
Had put on wing and motion, to fulfil  
Their beauty at the will  
Of some enchantress of the olden days.  
About the glancing ways  
Of the bright garden ceaselessly they went,  
Weaving its ravishment  
Into fresh groups of colour and delight.

And as their pageant bright  
Eddied and wound among the garden-grots,  
From all their fluted throats  
There was a vaporous choral song exhaled,  
As 'twere the spirit fail'd  
Within them, for delight, to shape its bliss  
Into the words that kiss  
The ear with perfect music, and was fain  
For very rapturous pain  
Of ecstasy to lapse into a song.

Now on the glittering throng  
Long time the squire had gazed, held in a trance  
Of joy, nor dared advance  
His spell-bound feet; and oft for bliss he sigh'd.  
But that fair maid, his guide,  
Laid hands on him and brought him, through the  
crowd  
Of maidens snowy-brow'd,  
To the mid-garden, where the throne was set.

Then did the man forget  
All things that blazon'd earthly life for him,  
And all his dream grew dim  
Before a new-born wonder: for, as there  
He stood, he was aware  
Of a fair shape that sat upon the throne,  
Such as to him was shown  
In dreams the image of his Queen of Love.

Clear was her brow above  
The crystals of the snow for purity,  
And round its ivory  
Were set seven silver stars for diadem  
Upon the waving hem  
Of the rich tresses, that did ripple down  
A flood of golden-brown,  
The colour of the early chestnut's robe,  
When yet the summer's globe  
Is but half rounded out with flower and sun.  
And from the stars did run  
Commingling rays of many-colour'd light,  
That with a strange delight  
Fill'd all the trancèd network of her hair,  
Wherein for all men's care  
Were set soft anodynes and balms of sleep.  
Within her lips, a deep  
Of coral garner'd up its pearls a-row,  
And in her arching brow  
There were two eyes unfathomable set,  
Wherein might one forget  
The glance of the dead friend of bygone years  
And the sweet smile through tears  
Of the lost love of youth ; for they were clear  
And soft as a hill-mere  
After spring-rains, whenas the early dew  
Has fallen in its blue,  
And yet with some strange hints of deeper tones,  
Such as the June night owns,



Before the moon is full, when the clear stars  
Ride on their jewell'd cars,  
Queenless, across the purple of the skies  
And the day-murmur dies  
Under the vaulted dome of amethyst.

With such lips Dian kiss'd  
Endymion sleeping on the Latmian sward :  
From such twin eyes were pour'd  
The philtres of the summer night upon  
The evil-fortuned son  
Of Priam, smitten with a fearful bliss.

Whoever had the kiss  
Of her red lips kiss'd never woman more,  
Having attain'd the shore  
Of that supernal bliss the ancients sought  
So long, but never wrought  
To find,—the very perfectness of love.  
Upon one hand, a dove,  
Pearl-white and with a golden collar, set,  
Was for a symbol set,  
And in the other one, lily-blossoms she held,  
Gold-cored and snowy-bell'd,  
The sceptre of her queendom.

'Twiixt the snows

Of her fair breast, a rose,  
Mix'd red and white, lay droop'd with heavy head,  
As with the mightihead

Of love that fill'd her presence all forespent.

And as on him was bent  
That full sweet visage, its sheer perfectness  
Of glory did possess  
The squire with such a wondering delight  
Of bliss, and such a might  
Of hurrying thoughts, that for the very fire  
Of his fulfill'd desire  
The life well-nigh forsook him ; and eftsoon  
He would have fallen aswoon  
Before that Lady of all loveliness,  
That from the ardent stress  
And furnace of his dream to shape had grown.

But she, to whom were known  
The passions that within his soul did meet,  
Descending from her seat,  
Bent down and in her ivory arms embraced  
His neck and all enlaced  
His failing visage with her woven hair,  
Holding him captive there  
Within a gold and silver prison house.  
Then, parting from the brows  
His ruffled hair, she kiss'd him on the mouth ;  
And suddenly the drouth  
Of yearning, that so many years had tried  
His spirit, did subside,  
And was all quench'd within a honied deep

Of kisses, that did steep  
His soul in ravishment ineffable  
And restful.

So there fell

A woof of sleep upon his every limb ;  
And in the trances dim  
Of twining dreams, he heard a silver song  
From all that glittering throng  
Of lovely girls and jewel-plumaged birds  
Fill all the air with words,  
That (if with devious weary earthly speech  
One might avail to reach  
Some echo of their sweetness) in this wise  
Somewhat did fall and rise,  
Like sea-waves beating on a golden bar  
Of sands, but lovelier far.

*Song.*

I.

*Low laid in thyme  
And nodding asphodels,  
Dream on and feel flower-fragrance kiss  
Thy forehead free from all the dints of time :  
Thou shalt awake to greater bliss,  
Bounden with linkèd spells  
Of love and rhyme.*

I

## II.

*Fear not, pale friend,  
Thy dream shall ever die :  
Thou hast attain'd the shores of rest,  
Where the wave-break against the grey beach-bend  
Brings up sad singings from the West  
No more. Here Love is aye  
Sweet without end.*

## III.

*For here the grief  
And sadness left behind  
With weary life are turn'd to gold  
Of dreams : from stern old memories a sheaf  
Of strange delights unfold  
Their sweets, like flowers we find  
Under a leaf.*

## IV.

*Here in this deep  
Of grass-swathes piled with flowers,  
All things most fair and loveliest,  
Too pure for earth and all her toil to reap,  
Do lie and crush the fruits of rest,  
And all the golden hours  
Lie down to sleep.*

## V.

*Here Love doth sit,  
No longer sad and cold,  
As in the weary life of men  
The hard stern need of toil has fashion'd it ;  
But very pure and silver-clear again,  
And withal red as gold  
For crownals fit.*

## VI.

*Here hope is not,  
Nor fear : for all the ease  
One wearied for in worldly strife  
Were but as nought beside one pearly grot  
Of this fair place, and all a life  
Of fears herein would cease  
And be forgot.*

## VII.

*Hath any dole?  
Bird-songs are comforting,  
And all the flower-scents breathe of balm :  
Dream on and soothe the sadness from thy soul ;  
For here life glitters like a calm  
Of summer seas that sing  
A barcarolle.*

## VIII.


*Count life with flowers !  
This is our dial here.  
A kiss and violets twined around  
The brow ; soft sleep in honeysuckle bowers,  
Lilies and love with roses crown'd,  
Sweet scents of eglatere  
Cadence our hours.*

## IX.

*Dream within dream ;  
Dreaming asleep, awake ;  
There is no sweeter thing than this,  
To lie beneath flower-snow and fountain-gleam,  
Save if with touch of lips and kiss  
One win the sleep to break,  
Yet hold the dream.*

## III.

## FALLING AWAY.


 O the song hover'd over Ebhardt's  
     sleep,  
     By many a silver sweep  
 And many a golden sigh of horns and  
     flutes

And broidery of lutes  
 Within the failing cadences sustain'd :  
     And, as he slept, the stain'd  
 Worn harness and accoutrements from him  
     Were borne, and every limb  
 Was purified from all the dust of toil  
     And all that journey's soil,  
 In essences of all the balms that be  
     In Ind or Araby  
 For purging all life's weary stains and sad.

Then on the man was clad  
 Fair raiment, thrice in Tyrian purples dyed,  
     Gold-fringed and beautified  
 With broidery of pearl-work silver-laced ;  
     And on his breast they placed

A golden owch, rare-wrought and coral-chain'd.  
And as the singing waned,  
The magic slumber slid away from him ;  
And therewithal the dim  
Sad doubts and weariness of earth forewent  
The man, and there was lent  
To every limb a perfectness of ease,  
As in the golden seas  
Of some spell'd ocean he had bathed and cast  
His age off.

So he past  
With that fair queen athwart the dreamy land,  
Wandering, hand in hand,  
Through many courts and jewel-vaulted halls,  
Wherein the trellis'd walls  
Show'd through the sunflecks,—carved and limnèd  
o'er  
In all the lovely lore  
Of Faërie and all the glitterance  
Of Orient romance ;  
And in one chamber,—thick with jasmine stars  
Woven betwixt the bars  
Of gold that latticed all the sides from floor  
To roof-tree, vaulted o'er  
With one clear bell of sapphire silver-ray'd,—  
Them side by side they laid  
On beds of sandal wood and cramoizin ;  
Then did fair maids bring in



A banquet, set and sweet in golden shells,  
Mingled with great flower-bells  
And cups of jasper and corneliand.  
There peacocks did expand  
Their jewell'd fans, fresh from the fairy looms ;  
Hérons with argent plumes,  
Untorn by falcon, lay on silver beds ;  
And opal-blazon'd heads  
Of dove and culver glitter'd out through green  
Of bedding moss. Between  
Gold lilies lay the silver-feather'd swan,  
Reclined in death upon  
Lush leaves of vine and flowers of oranges ;  
And every bird that is  
For pleasant food ordain'd, in vine leaves wet  
With crystal dew, was set  
Before the twain, each in its several room.  
And from the jewell'd gloom  
Of ocean-deeps there came its lovely things,  
Gold fish with silver wings,  
Great diamond-sided carp with opal eyes,  
Dolphin that ever dies  
A rainbow glory and an eye-delight ;  
Sword-fish, and shell-fish bright  
With ruby armour, mullets gold and grey,  
And all the rest that play  
Among the hyacinthine cool sea-deeps—  
Where many a coral creeps  
'Mid pearls and weeds of every lovely hue—

Until themselves endue  
The radiance of the pearl and coral things  
And the clear colourings  
Of feather'd sea-flowers thick about their life.  
These all and more were rife,  
Outlaid—for food of men to godship grown—  
In many a precious stone  
Graven with silver to the mimic cup  
Of that fair flower that up  
From the still lake holdeth its silver star,  
That men call nenuphar.  
There did the beehives yield their amber dew,  
Glittering pale golden through  
The frail white fretwork of the honeycomb ;  
And in their velvet bloom  
Shone gold and purple fruits of the year's prime,  
That in the Autumn-time  
Of some far wondrous land had hung and glow'd,  
What while the winter rode  
On his pale horse across the stricken earth ;  
And the clear soul of mirth  
And love was there in chalices of wine,  
Such as no earthly vine  
Has ever dreamt of in its dreams of June ;  
And all the place was strewn  
With jewels full of juices wonder-sweet,  
That seem'd for kings more meet  
To wear upon their brows, than to suffice,  
Even in Paradise,

Unto men's hunger. Over all there fell  
A shower of asphodel  
And almond-blossoms, and the air did rain  
With roses.

So the twain  
Lay at the banquet upon silken flowers,  
Whilst through the gradual hours  
Bright sights and sounds did charm the time's advance  
For them. One while, a dance  
Of wood-nymphs glitter'd circlewise across  
The windflower-sprinkled moss,  
That paved the halls; or from the fountain's deep  
Of silver sands would sweep  
A flight of green-hair'd naiads, dripping gold  
And pearls from every fold  
Of their wet hair and weed-ytangled dress;  
And then, perchance, the stress  
Of silver clarions and the sweet sad thrill  
Of the struck harps would fill  
The air, preluding to a cavalcade  
Of lovely shapes array'd  
In cramoizin and azure,—dames and knights  
And all the eye-delights  
Of the old pageantries of queens and kings;  
And to the cadenced strings  
And reeds swell'd up the clash of shields and  
spears  
And the fair dreadful fears

Of the bright battle and the hot tourney :  
    The clang of the sword-play  
Rang out from targe and morion, and the ring  
    Of lance-points shivering.  
The banners and the tabards ebb'd and flow'd,  
    The jewell'd crownals glow'd  
In tireless changeful splendour ; and the haze  
    Of the far-column'd ways  
Did burn with glancing mail and blazonries  
    Of all bright hues one sees  
In the fair pictures of the olden time.  
    And oft with many a rhyme  
The minstrels fill'd the pauses, in quaint lays  
    And songs of bygone days  
Hymning the praise of many a champion  
    Of times past.

                                So slid on  
The dream along the halls of phantasy,  
    Folding him blissfully  
Within a rapturous calm ; but, more than this,  
    That crownèd lady's kiss,  
The woven magic of her tresses' gleam  
    And her soft eye's sunbeam,  
Fetter'd the dreamer in a silken trance  
    Of masterful romance.

Now, as the meal was done with many a song  
    And luting from the throng

Of pearl-limb'd girls,—the curtains of the day  
    Over the golden grey  
Of the sweet sky were drawn ; and the clear night  
    Came with its own delight  
Of lambent stars and heavy night-flowers' scent,—  
    Whenas the firmament  
Hangs o'er the earth like some great orange-grove  
    Wherethrough the fire-flies rove  
In some far night of Orient,—to enspell  
    The senses ; and the bell  
Of the slant sky grew hung with fretted lights.  
    For never fail the night's  
Enchantments in the land of dreams (as say  
    Some makers) nor the day  
With its sheer splendours satisfies the sense ;  
    But the restful suspense  
Of the sweet midnight is as welcome there  
    As morning, being fair  
And full of lovely spells of peace and rest  
    Graven on the palimpsest  
Of day with star-runes ; nor without the night  
    Could one have love's delight  
In perfect fulness.

                    So the night was spread  
    Above the golden bed  
Of those two lovers, whilst the harefoot hours  
    Trail'd through the rosy bowers  
Of that fair dream-stead, on the moonlight's wings ;

And all the lovely things,  
That fill the interspace betwixt sundown  
And the new-risen crown  
Of morning spread upon the Orient crests,  
Hover'd about the breasts  
Of that fair lady, as she lay asleep,  
Folded in peace as deep  
As the blue heaven with the gold stars fleck'd.

And when the new morn check'd  
His coursers for the sweep into the sky,  
And from the bravery  
Of newborn day the glammers of the night  
Folded their wings for flight  
Where through the dusk the sun had made a gap,  
Those lovers from the lap  
Of their sweet slumbers rose, and, hand in hand,  
Look'd over the fair land  
And saw the eternal spring grow young again  
Over each hill and plain  
Of that enchanted paradise of sweets :  
And the delight, that beats  
To amorous tunes within the spring-flower-blood,  
Spread out its silver flood  
Upon their spirits, like a radiant mist  
Of philtres ; and they kiss'd  
Again with doubled rapture.

In mid-green,

Under tall stately treen,  
In noble woods they wander'd, where the birds  
Hail'd them with golden words,  
Clearer and lovelier than earthly song ;  
And all the pure-eyed throng  
Of wood-flowers held sweet converse for their ease.  
The blue anemones  
Murmur'd quaint tender fairy-tales of spring  
And of the blossoming  
Of elfin souls in every pale sweet bud ;  
The fragile bells that stud  
The moss with cups of sapphire, when the year  
Brings round the Midsummer,  
Sang mystic songs for them of summer nights  
And all their deep delights  
Of panting stars and singing nightingales ;  
And heather-bells told tales  
Of elfins dancing on the thymy sward,  
What while the white moon pour'd  
Full hands of pearl upon the breezy moors.  
And as along the floors  
Of spangled moss they went, beneath the woofs  
Of leaves, the tiny hoofs  
Of deer smote softly on the woodland lawns,  
And the lithe brown-eyed fawns  
Laid velvet muzzles on their toying hands.

Now along golden sands  
By sapphire seas they walk'd, thick strewn with  
shells

Of each bright kind that dwells  
In seas, and watch'd the gold fish dart and flash  
Across the cool wave-plash,  
And the curl'd foam slide up and fall away  
Into a silver spray,  
As the great plangent waves broke, green and white,  
In sheets of malachite.

Then would the queen take Ebhardt by the hand,  
And from some jut of sand  
Down diving through the gold and emerald waves,  
Visit the coral caves  
Of the sea-nymphs and all the palaces  
Of crystal, under seas  
Built for the Nereïds' pleasure,—wandering  
Along the deeps that ring  
With mermaids' song, and plucking living flowers  
That in the deep sea bowers  
Wave for the mermen, gold and blue and white.

Or with a calm delight  
The twain lay floating on the silver foam,  
Watching the azure dome  
Of heaven wide-ceil'd above the emerald leas,  
And the light fragrant breeze  
Wafting the silver cloud-plumes o'er the blue.  
Haply, some bird that flew,  
Wide-winging, towards the golden-stranded East,  
Sometime its travel ceased



At her command, and in her ivory breast  
Nestling, awhile would rest  
And murmur stories of the wondrous things  
Each day of wing-work brings  
To one that pulses towards the rising sun.

And when the morn was done,  
Mayhap, returning to the land, the queen  
Within some heart of green  
Would sit and hold the man within her arms,  
Weaving with many charms,  
For him to living shape and lovely sooth,  
The memories of youth  
And the quaint fancies of his wildest dreams,  
Re-clad with golden beams  
Of mystic splendour, ever fresh and new ;  
So that but now he knew  
How very full his every thought had been  
Of all the lovely sheen  
And glamour of the land of phantasy.

Over the dappled lea  
And the slant hillside, violet-starr'd, would rise  
Before his ravish'd eyes  
Fair crystal castles and enchanted bowers,  
Trellised with magic flowers,  
That in their every calyx held a face  
Of an unearthly grace.  
Horn-notes came faint and far upon the breeze ;

Between the moss-clad trees  
Fair ladies pass'd, with greyhounds falcon-eyed  
And pages at their side ;  
And knights rode forth a-questing. Down the  
sward

Many a pageant pour'd  
Of the quaint elves that hold the ancient woods,  
And the gnarl'd race that broods  
Deep in the jewell'd chambers of the rock :  
Or with her milk-white flock  
Some dreamy shepherdess went sauntering by,  
With flowerful hands, and eye  
Fix'd on the petals of some rose of gold.

And now the lilies told  
The twain that day drew fast toward the dark.  
Then did they both embark  
In some fair shallop's pearl and ivory side,  
And down the glancing tide  
Of some full river, over-hung with trees,  
Glided before the breeze  
That fill'd the silken sails ; 'twixt terraced walls,  
Past rows of ancient halls  
And towers far-glancing 'gainst the golden sky ;  
Where all the courts did lie  
Ungated, and the dying sun sloped slow  
Along the evening glow  
Through range on range of golden palaces,

Glittering on lattices  
Of blue and silver, tenantless and still.  
A strange sad peace did fill  
The lonely streets ; and through the voiceless air,  
Perchance, some breeze would bear  
The silver sound of bells, whose music spread  
In circles overhead,  
Widening far out upon a stirless sea  
Of silentness.

Maybe,  
At times, the man would deem himself alone  
In some fair meadow, strown  
With bright-eyed flowers, or on some river's bank,  
Where rank on plumèd rank  
Sedges blew purple ; when, as he did deem,  
That sovereign of his dream  
Had for a little faded from his side :  
And at the first he sigh'd  
To find her place left empty suddenly ;  
But soon he knew that she  
Was ever with him, if invisible.  
Whether some cowslip's bell  
He idly broke or pull'd a violet up,  
Straightway from out the cup  
A sweet face look'd ; two tender dewy eyes  
Gazed deep in his, and sighs  
Of ravishing sweet music fill'd his ears,  
Until his soul with tears

Of joy brimm'd over : then two lips would seek  
 His own, as 'twere to speak  
 All things' love to him in a fragrant kiss ;  
 And ravish'd with the bliss,  
 He would press closelier on the flower and find  
 It was the queen that twined  
 Soft arms about him and laid lips to his  
 With such a flower-bell kiss,  
 Being both flower and bird and breeze and queen.

Or,—look'd he in the green  
 Of some fair crystal pool all fringed with sheaves  
 Of the nesh flower that weaves  
 Soft green and rosy-white of blooms around  
 Each lake that in the swoond  
 Of the mid-June lies stirless,—there would grow  
 From out the depths a snow  
 Of starry lily-petals, that between  
 Their golden-gaufred green  
 Unfolding, show'd to him a tender face,  
 Crown'd with a dripping grace  
 Of gold-brown hair, that through the waves rose high  
 Upon his lips to sigh  
 The soul of amorous longing. Being seen  
 Full, it was still the queen,  
 That in no wise could let man's love grow cold,—  
 Being so manifold  
 And rich in heart, that as each flower she knew  
 To love, or as the dew

Wooeth the moonbeam's kisses : she could take  
All shapes of love that wake  
Under the skies : whether the nightingale  
Telleth her amorous tale  
Unto the argent-blossom'd thorn,—the winds  
About the pale woodbinds  
Flutter with loveful longing, or the bees  
Around the anemones  
Fly with a bridal murmur ; she could win  
Her eyes to looks akin,  
And prison all their passion in her lays ;  
And in all other ways  
Wherein on earth is love made manifest—  
So that each loveliest  
And peerless for the hour of love should seem—  
That lady of a dream  
Could twine the souls of mortals with delight.

Nor with the deathless light  
Of love alone was Ebhardt's being blest :  
Around his footsteps press'd  
An ever-changing sea of lovely things ;  
The radiant flowerings  
Of all the poet-hopes a dreamer knows,  
While yet the dewy rose  
Of his fresh youth is wormless for the years  
The wraiths of the waste tears  
And the pure phantoms of the dear dead past

Came back to him at last  
In a new guise of shapes emparadised :  
For nothing it sufficed  
Unto the perfecting of his desire  
Of old, that for the squire  
The happy shapes alone of his strange dreams—  
Woven all of sunbeams  
And griefless flowers—should be fulfill'd for him :  
He must possess the dim  
Ethereal sadnesses that were so sweet,  
Before the stern year's feet  
Crush'd all the glory from the soul of pain ;  
And in his sight again  
Must the impalpable essence new abide,  
Sublimed and glorified  
By the transfiguring splendour of his dream :  
The much-loved dead must seem  
To walk with him the blossom-trellis'd ways ;  
And the remember'd gaze  
Of all the friends he loved in times gone by  
Meet him in every eye  
Of flower-cups blinking in the mossy leas ;  
And in each fragrant breeze  
Belovéd voices murmur him again  
Old songs of love and pain  
And hope undying.

So the man did move  
In one long dream of love,

And all his life was one great fairy-tale,  
Wherein no thing did fail  
Of the bright visions he had wont to see  
In his fresh youth.

\* \* \* \*

Ah me !

That joy should be so strong and pitiless  
And mortal men no less  
Inapt to bear its agony of sweets !  
That the delight that beats  
In the full veins should be the enemy  
Of this frail flesh ! That we  
Should ever prove so uncreate to bear  
The things that are most fair  
In our idea,— should faint and die before  
The dream of bliss is o'er !  
Alas ! we can bear sorrow and the stress  
Of earth's dull weariness,  
Day after day eating our bitter bread,  
Silent, with tears unshed  
And life still pulsing dumbly ; but the kiss  
Of the full rapturous bliss  
We dream of withers us with its delight ;  
And back into the night  
Of our despair needs must we fail and fall,  
Finding dull custom's thrall  
And the dumb pain of daily life less keen

And deadly than the sheen  
Of the bright bliss to us unbearable!

\* \* \* \*

So it to Ebhardt fell  
That he must be divorced from the delight  
That with such godlike might  
Of will he had prevail'd to win,—being strong  
To dare and to prolong  
His days in strife, cheer'd by some distant hope  
Dim-radiant in the scope  
Of the dull daily sky,—but not enough  
Strong for the splendid love  
Of that enchantress and the unearthly bliss  
That in that oasis  
Of dreams was his. Old was the man and weak,  
And wearily the weak  
Of the hard years had worn the youth from him,  
Deadening in heart and limb  
The soul of fire that erst burnt fresh and high.

So, when the ecstasy—  
Awhile by that excitement of his quest  
Conjured within his breast  
Out of the cinders of the ancient fire—  
Grew cold, the feeble sire  
In the full tide of bliss was like to drown,  
The stressful glories strown



About his life did burn and weary him  
    Beyond his strength ; his dim  
And age-worn sense fail'd with the ecstasy ;  
    And thus it came to be,  
That in the gold and purple of the land,—  
    Midmost the arms that spann'd  
Him round, the lips that on his lips did lie  
    And the deep orbs that aye  
Flooded his spirit with their tireless light,—  
    Through all the dear delight  
And glory of that life of flowers and dew,  
    Within the man there grew  
A longing, half-unconsciously, to wear  
    Once more the weight of care  
That deadens all the lives of mortal men,—  
    A wish to feel again  
The dull repose of the eventless days,  
    And from the stressful blaze  
Of that too-radiant dream once more to fade  
    Back to the level shade  
Of thoughtless men's dull daily round of life,  
    Wherein there was no strife  
Of earthly parts and forces to suffice  
    To joys of Paradise  
Whose fire none scatheless save a god might know.

    So day by day did grow  
The longing, 'spite his wish, within his thought ;  
    Albeit hard he fought

To conquer it, in all his looks it show'd ;  
 And all that bright abode  
 Was grown to him like some fair hurtful fire  
 Of o'er-fulfill'd desire,  
 That eats the heart to madness.

And one day,—

As on the breast he lay  
 Of that fair dame, and in the radiant deep  
 Of her strange eyes did steep  
 His soul in burning languor,—it befell  
 That the unquellable  
 Desire burst up, no more to be repress'd,  
 Out of his weary breast  
 With a great bitter cry ; and he was fain  
 To tell her of his pain  
 And of the mortal weakness, that in him  
 Stretch'd out—towards the rim  
 Of the sad world and the dull life-long bands—  
 Weary and weakling hands  
 Of backward longing, being all too frail  
 And world-worn to avail  
 For the hot passionate splendour of the things  
 Of his imaginings.

“The dreams of youth come back to me too late,  
 Sweetheart,” he said. “The gate  
 Of kindly death gapes wide for me ; and I  
 Would fain go back to die

Among the towns and cities of my folk,  
Under the wonted yoke  
Of mortal custom ; for I am but man,  
Nor for all longing can  
Shake off the leaden hand of age and use.  
And now my limbs refuse  
To bear the bliss of dreamland any more,  
And all my soul is sore  
With the long struggle. I had all forgot—  
Whilst that the flame was hot  
Of the new-found delight—that I was old,  
And that the creeping cold  
Of death came very nigh upon my feet :  
But now I feel it, sweet,  
And may not tarry with thee any more,  
That, with slow steps—before  
The pale Archangel touch me—I again  
May for awhile regain  
The tents of men and die among my kin,  
Repenting of my sin .  
And grasp for things beyond the reach or ken  
Of miserable men.  
Wherefore, I pray thee, kiss me yet once more—  
For all my heart is sore  
For parting from thee—and unspell my feet ;  
So haply I may greet  
The dwellings of my kind before I die.”

So he with many a sigh

Spake to the queen, and told her all his mind,  
 And she,—that had divined  
 And known his yearning many a day and long,  
 Yet ever did prolong  
 The time of parting with the man,—with slow  
 Sad loving speech said, “Go :  
 I may not bid thee stay with me, poor friend,  
 That to the common end  
 Of weary men draw’st nigh, and (being man)  
 Labourest beneath the ban  
 Of the all-conquering pain and may’st not bear  
 The bliss thyself didst rear  
 In thy high fancy. Go : I love thee still,—  
 Better, perchance,—and fill  
 Thy destiny ; for Fate is over all,  
 And one may not recall  
 The ordinance of God that fashion’d us,  
 Albeit despiteous  
 And very sad it seem.” And kiss’d him thrice  
 Upon the brow, in guise  
 Of parting.

Then the shape of her ’gan fade  
 Into the purple shade,  
 And the bright dreamland melted into air.

And Ebhardt,—standing there,  
 Upon a desolate sweep of heathy plain,  
 Whereo’er the night did wane

And the June day came from the golden sills  
Of heaven on the hills,—  
Saw all the towers of gold and jasper fall,  
And knew beyond recall  
His dream-built world with all its lovely might  
Faded into the night;  
And the hot tears brimm'd up his agéd eyes.

Then close to him did rise  
The carol of a lark ; and it befell  
That with the song the spell  
Of grief was lighten'd, and some sadden'd peace  
Came back to give him ease,  
Upon that sunward hymning of the bird.  
And looking round, he heard  
A joyous neighing, and his true old steed  
Came to him in his need,  
And rubb'd its head against his hand.

So he

Mounted and o'er the lea  
Rode, as the sun across the hills grew fair,—  
And in the innocent air,  
The flower-scents told of the fair midmost June,  
And the sweet early tune  
Of the waked birds sang of the faded Spring  
And the new flowering  
Of the fresh fields with all the Summer weaves

Of bloom,—and in the sheaves  
Of yellowing corn, the sunlight lay like gold  
Of consolation, told  
By the dear God unto the earth rain-worn  
And weary and betorn  
By snow and tempest.

So the old Squire rode  
Upon the homeward road,  
Among the fields, where all the world was glad,  
And none that he was sad  
Had time to note,—and with the dying day  
Came to a town, that lay  
Childwise within the bosom of the hills,  
And in the peace that fills  
The hour of sunset, slept beneath the sky,  
In one great panoply  
Of crimson glory. And, indeed, it seem'd  
Most like the thing he dream'd  
Of the celestial city, where alone  
This flesh shall have outgrown  
The feebleness of life.

And so he came  
Into the town, all lame  
And worn with travel and his hopes down cast;  
And there he found at last  
A little weary rest among strange men,

And was at peace again.  
And there a resting-space he did abide ;  
And in the Autumn-tide  
A little while thereafterward he died.









SIR FLORIS.



“ A un chevalier de Provence vint ennuit un appel miraculeux et luy fut IN NOMINE CHRISTI par trois fois mandé soy lever et ensuyvre une colombe blanche : ce que fesant fut mené dans un jardin mirifique ou avecques grant poine occist sept bestes mescréés que auters ne furent que li sept pechiés mortels. Adonc fut merveillousement emporté par dessus les mers au Mont Salvat ou gist recelement le sacrosainct Greal. La fut accolé chevalier du Greal et voire luy apparust nostre Seignour et luy baisa de sa propre bouche. Sur ce perdist connoissance et lors de son resveil soy trouva chiez luy. Cy-après erra maints ans par le monde ouvrant loiaument ès choses de son servage : aussi dict on que ce durant fut par deux fois de plus visité de ladiste colombe et puis fut en toute vie ravi fors de ce monde. Cert est toutes fois que ne rapparust mais aux yeulx humains.”—*Le Violier des Histoires Provençiaux.*



TO THE AUTHOR OF LOHENGRIN.

THE ROMAUNT OF SIR FLORIS.

**I***N this sweet world and fair to see,  
There is full many a mystery,  
That toil and misery have wrought  
To banish from the sight and thought  
Of striving men in this our air  
Of pain and doubt, and many a fair  
Sweet wonder that doth live and move  
Within the channel of Christ's love.  
And of these, truly, aforetime  
Was made full many a tender rhyme  
And lay of wonder and delight ;  
And by full many a noble knight  
And minstrel was the story told,  
With the sweet simple faith of old,*

*Of how the questing was fulfill'd  
Of that Sangreal that was will'd  
By the dear God to Galahad,  
And how by many a one was had  
Rare venture in the holy Quest,  
Albeit very few were blest  
With comfort in the sight of it;  
And by that menestrel, to wit,  
(Oh sweetest of all bards to me  
And worthiest to Master be  
Of all that sing of Christ His knight  
And Questing of the Grail!) that hight  
Of Eschenbach, the tale was writ  
Of Percivale, that now doth sit  
Within the bosom of the Lord,  
And how he strove with spear and sword  
Full many a year for Christ His grace.  
And with delight of those old lays,  
There long has murmur'd in my brain  
A song that often and again  
Has cried to me for utterance;  
And now—before the sad years chance  
To bear all thought of holiness  
From men with mirk of pain and stress  
Of toil—it wearies me to tell  
Of all that unto Floris fell,  
And all his toil and all his bliss  
And grace in winning to Christ's kiss.*

*Wherefore, I pray you, hearkeneth  
The while with scant and feeble breath  
I tell to you a quaint old tale,  
Wherein is neither sin nor bale,  
But some sweet peace and sanctity :  
And there not only wonders be,  
But therewithal a breath of love  
Is woven round it and above,  
That lovers in the Summer-prime  
May clasp warm hands o'er this my rhyme,  
As finding there some golden sense  
Of Love's delicious recompense :  
For what withouten love is life ?  
And if therein is any strife,  
Or therewithal offences be,  
I pray you pardon it to me :  
Wherefore, Christ hearten you, I say,  
Et Dieu vous doint felicité.*



## I.

## THE FIRST COMING OF THE DOVE.



HEARD by the confluence of Rhone  
 A castle of old times alone  
 Upon a high grey hill did stand,  
 And look'd across the pleasant land ;  
 And of the castle castellain  
 And lord of all the wide domain  
 Of golden field and purple wood  
 And vineyards where the vine-rows stood  
 In many a trellis, Floris was ;  
 A good knight and a valorous,  
 And in all courtesies approved,  
 That unto valiantise behoved.  
 Full young he was and fair of face,  
 And among ladies had much grace,  
 And favour of all men likewise :  
 For in such stout and valiant guise  
 His years of manhood had he spent  
 In knightly quest and tournament,  
 There was no knight in all the land  
 Whose name in more renown did stand,

And the foe quaked to look upon  
The white plume of his morion,  
    When through the grinding shock of spears  
    Sir Floris' war-cry pierced their ears  
And over all the din was blown  
The silver of his clarion.

So was much ease prepared for him,  
And safety from the need and grim  
Hard battle against gibe and sneer  
That must full oft be foughten here—  
    For evil fortune and the lack  
    Of strength to thrust the envious back—  
By many a noble soul and true ;  
And had he chosen to ensue  
    The well-worn path that many tread  
    For worship, all his life were spread  
Before him, level with delight.  
But if in shock of arms and fight  
    Of squadrons he disdainèd not  
    To win renown, the silken lot  
Of those that pass their days in ease  
And dalliance on the flower'd leas  
    Of life was hateful to his soul ;  
    And so—when once the battle's roll  
And thunder was from off the lands  
Turn'd back and from the war-worn hands  
    The weapons fell—he could not bring  
    His heart to brook the wearying

Of peace and indolent disport  
Of ease. Wherefore he left the court—  
So secretly that no one knew  
Awhile his absence—and withdrew  
A season to his own demesne,  
And there in solitude was fain  
To yearn for some fair chance to hap  
And win his living from the lap  
Of drowsy idlesse with some quest,  
That should from that unlovely rest  
Redeem him to the old delight  
Of plucking—in the bold despite  
Of danger—from the brows of Fate  
Some laurel. Nor had he to wait  
The cooling of his knightly fire ;  
There was vouchsafed to his desire,  
Ere long, a very parlous quest,  
That should unto the utterest  
Assay his knightly worth and test  
The temper of his soul full well  
And sore. And in this wise it fell.

It chanced one night,—most nigh the time  
When through the mist-wreaths and the rime  
The hours begin to draw toward  
The enchanted birthnight of the Lord,—  
That in the midnight, on his bed,  
He heard in dreams a voice that said  
“ Arise, Sir Floris, get thee forth,  
An thou wouldst prove thee knight of worth !”



Gross slumbers of the middle night  
So held and clipp'd the valiant knight,  
He might him not to speak address  
For slumber and for heaviness.

Again it rang out loud and clear,  
So that he might not choose but hear,  
And in his heart he quaked for fear ;  
But still he lay and answer'd not,  
Such hold had sleep upon him got.

A third time through the chamber past  
The voice, as 'twere a trumpet's blast :  
" Arise, Sir Floris, harness thee,  
For love of Christ that died on tree !"

He started up from sleep for fear  
And groped to find a sword or spear,  
Thinking some enemy was near ;  
But of no creature was he ware.  
He saw the moon hang in the air—  
As 'twere a cup of lucent pearl—  
And in the distance heard the swirl  
Of waters through the silence run ;  
But other sight or sound was none.

The moon's light lay across the night  
In one great stream of silver-white,



And folded round the Christ that stood  
At bedhead, carven in black wood ;  
And Floris, looking on the way  
Of light that through the chamber lay,  
Was ware of a strange blossoming—  
As of some birth of holy thing—  
That in the bar of silver stirr'd ;  
And as he gazed, a snow-white bird  
Grew slowly into perfect shape,  
As if some virtue did escape  
From that strange silver prisonhouse  
Into the city perilous  
Of life, and for its safety's sake  
The likeness of a fowl did take.  
The light seem'd loth to let it go  
Into this world of sin and woe  
(So pure and holy) and put out  
Long arms of white the dove about,  
As if to net it safely in :  
But, as the holy bird did win  
Its way and through the meshes rent,  
The rays of light together blent  
And fell into a cross of white,  
Whereon the silver dove did light  
Above the image benedight.

Sir Floris wonder'd at the sight,  
And looking on the cross, he deem'd  
That from the Christ a glory gleam'd

And lay in gold towards the door;  
And something bade him go before.

He rose and girt himself upon  
With helm and with habergeon,  
And in his hand his sword full bright  
He bore, that Fleurdeluceaunt hight.

The dove flew out into the air,  
And Floris follow'd through the bare  
Dumb ways and chambers to the gate,  
Whose open leaves for them did wait,  
And as into the night they past,  
Together were behind them cast.

The night was dumb, the moon did glower  
Upon them, like a pale sick flower  
That in the early chill of spring  
Mocks at the summer's blossoming,  
And over every hill and stowe  
The ways were white and sad with snow.

So pass'd he, with the silver dove  
That went before him and above,  
Within the sheeny moonés light—  
Wherewith her outspread plumes were dight  
So that it seem'd each wing became  
And grew into a silver flame—  
Until the hollow'd snow was track'd

Into a woodway, where there lack'd  
The moonlight, and the mountain-side  
With drooping ash and linden vied  
To keep the hollow place from ray  
Or glimmer of the silver-play.

The dove flew in, and, following,  
Sir Floris heard a muffled ring  
Of silver in the mountain's womb,  
As if dead music there had tomb.  
Here the dove folded wings and smote  
The part wherefrom the sound did float.

The mountain open'd, and they went,  
By force of some strange wonderment,  
Into a place of flowers, all sprent  
With jewels of the blossom-time;  
And all the air was sweet with rhyme:  
There reign'd an endless summer-prime.  
Tall green was there of leaféd trees,  
And in the blossom'd walks the breeze  
Was music, such as winds and plays  
About the May-sweet woodland ways,  
When spring is fresh and hope is clear;  
And in the place, where leaves are sere  
On earth, there lay great heaps of gold,  
Yweft by wonderment untold  
To semblance of the Autumn's waste,  
Through which the sweet wind play'd and  
chased

Its frolic breaths with perfume laden.

In grass stood many a white maiden

That lily in the outworld hight ;

And roses all the herbage dight.

Bright plaited beds of jewel-flowers

Were thick-set in the garden bowers,

And many a row of sunflowers stood

Along the marges of the wood,

And to the sapphire heaven turn'd,

As if towards the sun they burn'd.

About the blossoms, round and over,

Strange golden-crested birds did hover

That flash'd and sparkled like a flight

Of wingèd starlets in the night ;

And, as they went, their pinions beat

The air of that serene retreat

To rush and sweep of magic song,

And through the trees was sweet and strong

The trill of lark and nightingale.

There was not any note of wail

In song of birds or sweep of wind,

Such as in woodlands calls to mind

The last year's winter and the next,

Wherewith the listener's soul is vext

And thinks how short the spring will be,

And how the flower-times change and flee

Towards the dreary month of snows.

The full glad passion of the rose

Was joyous in the garden air,  
And every sight and sound was fair  
    With unalloy'd contentedness.

There could not enter any stress  
Of labour or of worldly woe ;  
But ever through the place did flow  
    A silver sound of singing winds,  
    A breath of jasmine and woodbinds,  
As if all joy were gather'd there  
And prison'd in the golden air.

And as Sir Floris wonderèd  
At those sweet flow'rets white and red,  
And at the stream's sweet song that set  
The garden-breezes all afret  
    With breaking waves of melody,  
    And at the bird's sweet minstrelsy,—  
There came to him a damozel  
(How fair she was no man can tell),  
And said, " Fair knight, now wit thou well  
    That thou hast gather'd great renown  
    In that sad world where trees are brown  
And ways are white in winter-time,  
And hast in many a maker's rhyme  
    Been celebrate for gentillesse  
    And valiant doings in the press  
Of armèd knights and battle-play,  
In tournament and in mellay ;  
    And over all the land is known

How, many a time, thy horn has blown  
To succour maidens in distress,  
And oftentimes have had redress

The needy by thy stroke of sword.

So that to him, that is the lord  
Of this fair place, the fame has won  
Of all that thou hast dared and done

In perfectness of chivalry ;

And he, who uses well to see  
Great deeds of arms and shock of spears,  
Has seen no one in all these years

That may be chosen for thy peer ;

And therefore has he brought thee here,  
To try thee if thou canst endure  
Battle and venture, forte et dure

Beyond the wont of men on earth ;

Wherein if thou canst prove thy worth,  
He will advance thee to his grace  
And set thee surely in high place  
Among his knights."

" Fair damozel,"

Said Floris, "liketh me full well  
The quest, by what you say of it :  
But now, I pray you, let me wit

Who is this lord, whose hest you bear,  
That is so high and debonair ?

And what adventure must I prove  
Before that I can win his love ?"

And she, " His name I may not tell ;  
Hereafter shalt thou know it well ;  
But thou shalt see him presently."

Then did she join her bended palms,  
And falling down upon her knee  
Among the knitted herbs and haulms,  
Did softly sing a full sweet rhyme ;  
And in a little space of time  
Was visible among the trees—  
Against a trellised work of green  
That at the garden's farthest end  
Among the leaves did twine and blend—  
A man, that walk'd among the flowers  
As softly as the evening hours  
Walk in the summer-haunted trees.  
Full tall and stately was his mien,  
And down his back the long hair lay,  
Red-gold as is the early day,  
Whereon a crown of light was set.  
Whoever saw might ne'er forget  
The sweetness of his majesty.  
But in no wise could Floris see  
Or win to look upon his face ;  
For, as he went, he turn'd aside  
His visage, as it were to hide  
The light of its unearthly grace  
From mortal eyes.



Then Floris said,  
“ I pray thee of thy kindlihead,  
Fair maid, that I may come to look  
On this lord's visage.” But she shook  
Her head, and “ Patience !” did she say.  
“ Thou must in fear and much affray  
For this fair place, and for the fame  
Of him that master of the same  
And sovereign is, be purged and tried,  
And through much venture must abide,  
Ere thou mayst look upon his face  
And win the guerdon of his grace,  
And now the time is come to prove  
Battle and hardship for his love.  
Adieu, sir knight : be bold and true !”

Whereat she sped beyond his view,  
And eke that figure vanishèd ;  
But Floris, lifting up his head,  
Was ware of a strange hand that bare  
A cross and stood in middle air,  
And on the white plume of his crest  
Did for a moment lie and rest.

Therewith great ease was given him,  
And healing freedom from all dim  
Sad doubts of fortune and of fate  
In that great strife, that did await  
His proving ; and the strength of men  
In him was as the strength of ten

Redoubled. Then he saw, beside  
His feet, a flower-bed fair and wide  
Of roses mingled red and white,  
Full sweet of smell and fair of sight,  
That in a trellised red-gold grate  
Did hold a sweet and lovely state  
And spread around such wealth of balm,  
Their scent seem'd one great golden psalm  
Of perfume to the praise of God.

Then Floris knelt upon the sod  
Of that fair place, and praying thrice  
Most heartily, did take advice  
That up the silver-spangled grail—  
That through the green did twine and trail  
Of that bright garden's goodliness—  
Some gruesome thing towards him did press,  
As 'twere the roses to despoil.  
So sprang he lightly from the soil,  
And from its scabbard iron-blue  
His falchion Fleurdeluceaunt drew,  
And kiss'd its fair hilt cruciform ;  
Wherewith his heart wax'd bold and warm  
With courage past the use of men.

Now was a loathly thing, I ween,  
Made visible to him—that might  
Well strike the boldest with affright.

For up the sward to him did run  
A beast yet never saw the sun ;  
As 'twere a dog with double head,  
Whose hinder parts were fashionèd  
Into the likeness of a worm.  
Full black and grisly was his form,  
And blazing red his eyes and tongue  
With raging choler, such as stung  
His lusting heart to rob and tear  
The flowers that in the garden were.  
But as he came anigh the place  
Wherein those roses all did grace  
The greensward, to his troubled sight  
Was visible that valiant knight,  
That in whole armour of blue steel  
Before the flowery shrine did kneel,  
To save the emblems of Love's joy  
From his most foul and rude annoy.  
Wherefore at him with open mouth  
The monster ran, as 'twere its drouth  
And ravening lust to wreak and slake  
Upon the knight. Then did he take  
His sword, and with so stout a blow  
Upon the beast's twin neck did throw  
The edge, that with the dolorous stroke  
The thread of its foul life he broke  
In twain, and from the sunder'd veins  
The black blood strew'd with loathly stains  
The tender grass and herbs therein ;

And as among the flower-stalks thin  
The hideous purple gore was sprent,  
From out the stain (O wonderment  
And grace of Mary merciful !)  
There open'd out the petals full  
And lovesome of that snowy bloom  
That is in all earth's sin and gloom  
The fairest of all flowers to see,  
The lily of white chastity.

Right glad was Floris of the sight,  
And of the scent that from the white  
Gold-hearted bells to him was lent ;  
And as he o'er the calyx bent  
To breathe its fragrance, suddenly  
There came a sound across the lea,  
That was as if a lion roar'd ;  
And truly o'er the blossom'd sward  
There ran to him a tawny beast,  
Red-maned, that never stay'd nor ceased  
To roar, until the knight could feel  
His hot breath through the grated steel  
That barr'd his vizor, and his claws  
Sought grimly for some joint or pause  
In the hard mail, where he might set  
His tusks and through the rent veins let  
The knight's life-blood upon the sward.  
But Floris, lifting up his sword,  
Him with such doughty strokes oppress'd  
Upon his red and haughty crest,

That soon he made him loose his hold ;  
And in a while, no longer bold  
    And arrogant, he would have fled,  
    But that Sir Floris on his head  
With the sharp edge smote such a blow,  
The red blood from the rift did flow,  
    And with the blood the life did pass :  
    Wherefore from out the bloodied grass  
There was uplift the rose of love,  
With scent and blossom fair enough,  
    I trow, to guerdon many a toil  
    And many a battle in the coil  
Of earthly woes.

                                    But there was yet  
No time for Floris to forget  
    His trouble in the red flower's sight :  
    He must again in deathly fight  
Be join'd for the security  
Of that fair garden's purity.  
    For swiftly in the lion's place  
    A raging leopard came, the grace  
Of those sweet roses to despoil ;  
And as he came, the very soil  
    Quaked underneath him, such a might  
    To wreak his cholerick despite  
'Gainst him that was the sovereign  
Of that fair place, and such disdain  
    Did rage in him, that he could see  
    No thing for anger. So was he

Against the roses well nigh come,  
Nay, was in act to spoil their bloom,  
    When through his heart the deadly blade  
    Slid cold ; and turning round, he made  
At Floris with a vengeful roar,  
And with his claws his thigh he tore.  
    A hand's-breadth in his agony.  
    Then down upon the grass fell he  
And died ; and in the tender sward,  
Whereon his felon blood was pour'd,  
    The sign of humbleness was set,  
    The flower that men call violet.

Full faint was Floris with the loss  
Of blood, that from the wound across  
    His thigh did run in many a rill,  
    And would have fain awhile been still  
Without reproof. But no repose  
Must he expect (nor one of those  
    That in God's battle fight on earth)  
    Nor pleasance of delight and mirth,  
But many a dint and many a blow  
Unceasing, till God will his woe  
    Be ended and the goal be won.

And so, as there he sat, anon,  
Whilst wearily he look'd along  
The fair wide path, he saw the long  
    Slow travel of a hideous snake,  
    That with much toil its way did make

Towards the roses where he stood.  
So faint he was with failing blood,  
He might not summon any strength  
To smite its black and gruesome length  
At vantage, crawling, but must wait  
Until, with slow and tortuous gait,  
It won to him. So weak he was,  
He could not choose but let it pass  
Towards the trellis ; and eftsoon,  
By him that lay in some half swoon,  
Across the grass it slid and twined  
Around the grating that confined  
The flowers, its black and hideous length,  
And breathed on them with all the strength  
Of hate its envying soul could know  
To gather in a breath, and so  
To spoil their fresh and goodly bloom :  
Whereat the blossoms with the gloom  
Of its black coils, that shut the light  
From over them, and with affright  
And sickness of its loathsome breath,  
Came very nigh to take their death.  
For with such potent spells the air  
Its venom darken'd of despair  
And malice, that the lovely red  
And white of their bright goodlihead  
Was to a sickly pallor turn'd,  
As if some loathly fever burn'd  
Within their hearts : and in a while  
No kiss of breeze or golden smile

Of sun had won them back to life,  
So spent were they with the fell strife  
Of that curs'd beast,—had not a sweep  
Of wings awaken'd from the sleep  
Of pain Sir Floris, and the scream  
Of a great bird, whose plumes did seem  
To brush his forehead, roused his sense  
From the constraint of indolence.

Then sprang he up in strength renew'd ;  
And when he saw the serpent lewd  
And hideous, that in his embrace  
Did strangle all the life and grace  
From out the flowers, he made at him  
And with a grip so fierce and grim  
Oppress'd his scaly swollen neck,  
That with the dolour and the check  
Of blood within his venom'd veins,  
The snake must needs relax the chains  
In which he held the roseray ;  
And in the act so mightily  
He leapt at Floris, that he wound  
His arms and body closely round  
With scaly rings, and so unneath  
Did grip the knight, that little breath  
Seem'd in his body to be left ;  
But, summoning all strength, he reft  
The horrid fetters from his breast,  
And flung the worm with utterest



His might full length against the ground.

There whiles it lay in seeming swoond ;

And Floris, thinking it was dead,

Would have lain down his weary head

Upon the grass, to take some ease

Awhile. Then from among the trees

There came that fowl, that had awoke

Him with its passing pinions' stroke,

And with so hard a buffet drove

Him down to earth, he could nor move

Nor speak awhile, but lay as dead :

And that foul bird, with eyes of red

And vulture claws, did strive the while

At every joint and crack of mail

To wound him with its noisome beak.

At last a place it found where weak

The armour was, and with such spite

Into Sir Floris' flesh did bite,

That for the fierceness of the pain

He started up from sleep again

And with so fierce and stout a blow

The vulture strake, the steel did go

Athwart the pinions and the crest,

And riving down the armour'd breast,

Did hew the gruesome snake in twain,

In whom the life began again

To flutter. So the loathly two

With that stroke died ; and with the dew

Of their foul blood, the lovely green  
Of the fair sward did such a spleen  
And hate of its despiteous hue  
Conceive, that quickly sprang to view  
A twine of snow-white clematis,  
The sign of sweet content that is ;  
And where the bird in death was cold,  
There grew the glad bright marigold,  
That in its gay and golden dress  
Was ever symbol of largesse,  
Since all along the meads there run  
Its mimic mirrors of the sun,  
Withouten any speck or flaw.

But none of this Sir Floris saw,  
Nor how the roses lightly wore  
The freshness of their bloom once more ;  
So weary was he and so worn  
With strife, and therewithal so torn  
With claws and beak of that fierce bird,  
He lay aswoon and saw nor heard  
Or sight or sound.

Now must I tell  
A wondrous thing that here befell,  
Through grace of God and Christ, His Son :  
For, while he lay aswoon, came one  
In white and shining robes array'd,  
And touch'd him on the lips and said,

“ Arise, Sir Floris, whole of wound,  
And fill thy quest !” And so was gone.

And Floris started up from ground,  
And was all whole in flesh and bone  
And full of heart the end to dare  
Of that hard venture.

Then the air  
Was of a sudden darken'd o'er  
With some foul thing, that semblance wore  
Of a half bird and a half worm,  
Join'd in one foul and loathly form ;  
And with the rattle of the scales  
Upon its wings—that (as huge flails  
Upon the golden garnered wheat  
With ceaseless rhythmic pulse do beat)  
Did lash and wound the golden air—  
The songs of breezes deaden'd were,  
And all was dumb for much dismay :  
And with its sight the lift grew gray.  
And as it wheel'd on open wings,  
With many blows and buffetings  
It strove to daunt that valiant knight  
And enforce him for sheer affright  
To yield to it and let it fill  
Its hungry maw at its foul will  
With those fair flowers. But Floris stood  
Undaunted, and with many a good  
Stout stroke of point did wound the beast,

Wherewith it bled and much increased  
Its ravenous rage. Then, suddenly,  
He felt sharp claws about his knee,  
And, looking down, no little wroth,  
He saw a huge and monstrous sloth,  
That with such force did hug his thighs  
And gript his arms in such hard wise,  
That he could scarce with bended shield  
Resist him, nor with power could wield  
His trusty sword; and as he strove  
That monster from his grip to move,  
The dragon with so fell a swoop  
Against him from on high did stoop,  
That down upon the ground he fell,  
And in the falling did repel  
The sloth from off him. Then the twain  
With such foul rage at him again  
Did press and buffet, that the life  
Out of his breast with that fierce strife  
Was well nigh chased: but, by good hap,  
It chanced he fell into the lap  
Of those fair blooms of various kind  
That did his victory call to mind  
Against the cruel beaten foes;  
And, falling heavily from blows  
Of beak and talons, he with such  
A grinding weight did press and crush  
The blossoms in the harsh and rude  
Encounter, they must needs exude

From out their chalices the sweet  
And precious essences that meet  
To make the perfume of a flower,  
And on his face and hands did shower  
Their gracious balms. So sweet they were  
And of a potency so rare  
For salving every earthly pain,  
The life began in every vein  
With their pure touch to run and glow;  
And soon the weary weight and woe  
That lay on Floris was dispell'd.  
Then, with new strength, from him he fell'd  
That hideous sloth; and being free  
An instant from his tyranny  
And harsh oppression, to his feet  
He sprang once more, and to defeat  
The wingèd worm himself address'd,  
That tore and ravish'd at his crest  
With ceaseless fury; but it drew  
Beyond his reaching, when it knew  
Its comrade worsted, and was fain  
To wait till it revived again.  
But Floris, with a doubled hand,  
Smote at the bear with his good brand  
So fell a stroke, the sharp death slid  
Through bone and sinew and forbid  
Returning life to enter in  
That loathly dwelling, foul with sin  
And sloth;—and so the thing was dead.

And from the blood its slit veins bled  
There came to life the blossoms sweet  
And gold-eyed of the Marguerite,  
Incoronate with petals white.

But that foul serpent with the sight  
Of that good blow so sorely grieved  
And fill'd with rage to be bereaved  
Of its grim comrade was, it threw  
All fear aside and fiercely flew  
At Floris, with the armèd sting  
Of its writhed tail all quivering  
In act to strike, and with so strong  
A swoop the dart did thrust and throng  
Through dent and ring of riven mail,  
The deadly point it did prevail  
To bury deep in Floris' breast.  
Whereat such rage the knight possess'd  
That all the dolour he forgot  
(Though very fierce it was, God wot,  
And sad) and throwing down his blade,  
With such a mighty force he laid  
To drag that scorpion from his side,  
The serpent's tail in twain he wried  
And in such hideous wounds it rent,  
That from the body coil'd and bent  
With anguish it must needs divide.  
Wherewith the cleft did open wide,  
And such a flood therefrom did flow

Of blood upon the herbs below  
That needs it seem'd the flowers must die ;  
And with the pain so fierce a cry  
Of agony the dragon gave,  
There is no heart of man so brave  
And firm but he must quake at it.

And now the doom of death was writ  
In heaven for that unholy beast ;  
And in a little while it ceased  
To cry, and down upon the ground  
It fell and died ; and all around  
The firm earth quaked. And as it died,  
The blood—that wither'd far and wide  
The herbs and 'mid the stalks did boil  
For rage—was dried into the soil ;  
Wherefore there sprang from out the stain  
The holy purple of vervain,  
The plant that purgeth earth's desire.

Now may Sir Floris well aspire  
To have that peace he needeth so,  
And easance after toil and woe :  
For there is none to fight with him  
Of all those beasts so fell and grim ;  
Nor any sign of further foe  
Within the garden is, I trow,  
To let him from his victory ;  
And all around the place was free

From fear ; the breezes were atune  
 Again with birdsongs, and the boon  
 Of scent within the flowers once more  
 Was golden, nor the heavens wore  
 The hue of horror and dismay :  
 And so he may be blithe and gay  
 And have sweet pleasance.

But alas !

No thought of this for Floris was.  
 Within his veins the venom 'gan  
 To curdle, and the red blood ran  
 With frozen slowness, as the sting  
 Of pain went ever gathering  
 Fresh fierceness through him. Very nigh  
 It seem'd to him he was to die.  
 He felt the chill of the last hour  
 Creep through him and the deathswears pour  
 Adown his brow : such agony  
 Along his every vein did flee,  
 He could no longer up endure,  
 Nor hope for any aid or cure ;  
 But down upon the earth he sank  
 Aswoon, with faded lips that drank  
 The dews of death, and, with a prayer  
 Half mutter'd in his last despair,  
 The sense forsook him. So he lay  
 Aswoon, poor knight, and (well-a-way !)  
 Most like to die.



But there was thought  
In heaven for him that thus had fought  
For that fair garden's sake. The love  
Of the dear God that dwells above  
Was mindful of him, though he knew  
It not. And so to him there drew  
A tender dream,—as there he lay  
Smitten to death with that fierce fray,—  
And fill'd his thought ; and it did seem  
To him, by virtue of the dream,  
That over him an angel stood,  
And with a sweet compassion view'd  
His piteous state, and whiles did strew  
Soft balms upon him, strange and new  
Unto his sense,—so comforting  
And sweet of scent, they seem'd to bring  
To him the airs of Paradise ;  
And with their touch the cruel ice  
Of death, that bound his every sense,  
Was melted wholly ; and the dense  
And cruel anguish, that untied  
The threads of living, did subside ;  
And gradually peace came back  
Into his spirit, and the rack  
Of pain and agony from him  
Was lifted. So upon the rim  
Of the sad soul a little life  
Began to hover, as at strife  
With Death, reluctant to forego

His late assurèd prey ; and so  
The breath came back by slow degrees  
To the spent soul, and in great ease  
Awhile he lay : and whiles he dream'd  
He was in heaven, and it seem'd  
He heard the golden harpings stir  
The air to glory, and the choir  
Of seraphim that stand around  
The throne, with one sweet pulse of sound  
Coörder'd, lift descant of praise  
To Him that is the Lord of Days  
And Ancient.

Then he seem'd to hear  
A voice that murmur'd in his ear—  
As 'twere a ring of broken chords  
Angelic, mingled with sweet words  
(So silver-clear it was)—and bade  
Him open eyes : and then one laid  
Soft hand upon his lids, and drew  
The darkness from them. So the blue  
Of heaven again was visible  
To him, as 'twere some great sweet bell  
Of magic flowerage in some prime  
Of summer in old fairy-time :  
And drinking slowly use of light  
And sense of life and its delight  
Back into eyes and brain, he turn'd  
His gaze from where the heaven burn'd

With full sweet summer, and was ware  
Of a fair champion standing there,  
Past mortal beauty. All in white  
And spotless mail was he bedight,  
So clear that there is nothing fair  
And goodly but was mirror'd there,  
And yet no evil thing nor sad  
Was there. Upon his helm he had  
A fair gold cross, and on his shield  
The semblance of a lamb did wield  
A fair gold cross. Upon his crest  
The snows of a fair plume did rest  
And waved ; and eke his pennoncel  
Was white as is the new-blown bell  
Of that fair flower that loves the wind,  
And round his dexter arm was twined  
A snow of silk. Full glorious  
The splendour of his harness was,  
And wonder-lovely to behold :  
But as white silver and red gold  
Are pale beside the diamond,  
So was his visage far beyond  
His arms in glory and delight  
Of beauty. There was such a might  
Of stainless virtue and of all  
Perfection pictured, and withal  
So wondrous tender in aspect  
He was, it seem'd as if the Elect  
Of Christ on earth in him did live ;

That, with glad eyes, men might arrive,  
Beholding him, to know that love  
And gentillesse of God and prove  
In him the sweetness of that grace  
That shinèd ever in Christ's face  
On earth.

And so in very deed  
It seem'd to Floris that the need  
Of earth was over, and his soul  
Was won thereto where life is whole—  
Withouten any stress or dole—  
At last in joyance, and his eyes  
Did view, in robes of Paradise,  
That tender angel of the Lord,  
That into men's sore bosoms pour'd  
Sweet balms and comfort, being set  
To temper justice and the fret  
Of life with love most pitiful.  
And whilst he thus did gaze his full  
Upon the radiance of that wight,  
The soft and undefiled delight,  
That in his eyes did hold full sway,  
So purged all Floris' awe away  
And eke such boldness to him gave  
That he was fain of him to crave  
His name.

Then, " I am Galahad,  
Christ's knight," he said.

Whereat full glad  
Was Floris, and all reverently  
Unto the earth he bent his knee  
    Before the knight, and (an he list)  
    Would fain the broider'd hem have kiss'd  
Of his white robe ; but Galahad  
Did raise him quickly up and bade  
    Him henceforth kneel to God alone,  
    That on the height of Heaven's throne  
Is for man's soul the only one  
Of worship, save sweet Christ, His Son,  
    And Mary mother pitiful ;  
    And henceforth were no kings that rule  
So blest as Floris now should be,  
Since that with such high constancy  
    And noble faith he had withstood  
    The shock of that unholy brood,  
And in fair fight had vanquish'd them.  
Wherefore for crown and diadem  
    Of triumph, on the greensward freed  
    From those foul beasts that there did bleed  
Their life away beneath his blade,  
In goodly order were array'd  
    For him those pleasant blooms and fair,  
    That not alone so debonair  
And blithe of aspect were, but eke  
Had virtues—more than one might speak  
    In wearing of a summer's day—  
    For purging fleshly lusts away

And cleansing from his heart—who wore  
Their beauty fairly—all the sore  
    Sad doubts and weariness of earth,  
    So that with an immortal mirth  
And constant faith his soul was glad,  
And evermore sweet peace he had  
    In love of God and eke of Christ,  
    The which against all ills sufficed  
Of mortal life. And as he spoke  
From the slight stems those flowers he broke  
    That 'midst the herbage did entreat  
    The eye with blossom very sweet  
And gracious ; and (O wonderment !)  
Being in his hand conjoin'd, they blent  
    Their essences in such rare wise,  
    It seem'd from each sweet bell did rise  
A sweeter perfume, and more bright  
Their semblance grew, as 'twere some might  
    Of amity was moved in them—  
    Being so join'd into one stem—  
To heighten each one's loveliness  
With all its fellows did possess  
    Of blithe and sweet. And therewithal,  
    When from the grass those flow'rets all  
Were gather'd, to Sir Floris came  
That noblest knight, and in Christ's name,  
    With fairest look and friendliest speech,  
    Him of his kindness did beseech  
That he from him those blooms would take  
And breathe their fragrance.

Scarce awake  
From swoon was Floris yet ; and so  
He took them with dull hands and slow,  
And did address himself to scent  
Their breath, as one half indolent  
With sleep ; but when the gracious smell  
Was won to him, that from each bell  
Did float and hovering was blent  
Into some wondrous ravishment  
Of sweets,—there smote him such a sense  
Of gladsome ease and recompense  
Of all his labours, that the dull  
Gross drowsiness, that did annul  
The soul within the man, forsook  
Him wholly ; and withal he took  
Such gladness, that in every vein  
The life seem'd blithely born again ;  
And through his frame so fresh a flood  
Of ardour pour'd, it seem'd the blood—  
That in men's pulses sluggishly  
Does throb and flutter—was made free  
From earthly baseness and was turn'd  
To heavenly ichor. For there burn'd  
Within him such a fire of hope,  
He felt his soul no more did grope  
Within the dreary dusk of earth,  
But on the wings of a new birth  
Towards the highest heaven did soar.  
Nor was there for him any more

A thought of weariness or woe ;  
 But from the earth he rose, and so  
 Was ready for all venturing  
 And all the quest of holy thing  
 God might appoint him.

Then that knight,  
 That was apparell'd all in white,—  
 Most brightly smiling at the new  
 Glad ardour that did straight ensue  
 In Floris with those blossoms' scent,  
 And at the holy joy that brent  
 Upon the dial of his face,—  
 Within his arms did him embrace  
 And kiss'd him very lovingly.  
 Then in this wise to him spake he,  
 With grave sweet speech.

“ Beyond the brine,  
 Where in the Orient first the sign  
 Of dawn upon the sky is set,—  
 In that sweet clime where men forget  
 The winter, and the summer lies  
 So lovingly upon the skies,  
 That of a truth the very night  
 Is lucent and the cruel spite  
 Of darkness never wholly hides  
 The flowers, but aye some light abides,  
 Wherefore men call it morning-land,—



A fair and stately house doth stand,  
Wherein, by help of God His grace,  
Unto my lot it fell to place  
That holy token of the Lord,  
That He to mortals did afford  
Awhile on earth to look upon  
For consolation ; but anon,  
Moved to slow anger by their sin  
And stubborn wickedness, within  
His mystery He did withdraw  
The blessèd thing: but yet the law  
Of that sad doom He temperèd—  
Of His great grace and kindlihead—  
With mercy. For it was ordain'd  
That if one kept himself unstain'd  
And pure from every lust and sin,  
A virgin, he should surely win  
And come to taste of that sweet food  
Of the Redeemer's flesh and blood.  
And unto me such grace was given  
That of all champions that have striven  
I have been chosen from the rest  
For winning of the Holy Quest ;  
Since that, as in the Writ we read,  
God of the humblest may indeed  
Be pleased to make His instrument,  
Even unto me that joy was sent,  
Surpassing all that of old time  
Is told for us in minstrel's rhyme

Of Heaven's mercy : and, God wot,  
Were passèd o'er Sir Lancelot  
And sweet Sir Tristram, that again  
The world shall never of those twain  
Behold the like, such debonair  
And perfect gentle knights they were.

“ Wherefore to God it seemèd fit  
That a fair dwelling over it  
Should for its safe keeping be built :  
And that no breath of sin or guilt  
Might there approach, there was enroll'd  
A band of knights, in whom the gold  
Of virtue had been smelted out  
And purified from sin and doubt  
By toil and venture perilous.  
And in that high and holy house  
In goodly fellowship they dwell,  
Until to God it seemeth well—  
For long good service done—to call  
One of the brethren from the thrall  
Of earthly life, and with His blest  
In Paradise to give him rest.  
Wherefore, when one is call'd away,  
It is ordain'd that from the grey  
Of the sad world another knight—  
To fill his place who, benedict,  
Has won the guerdon of his strife—  
Be chosen out, to cast off life

And with much labour and much pain  
Be purified from earthly stain  
And tried with woe. If he endure  
And from the furnace come out pure  
Of sin and lusting, he shall stand  
For the dead brother in the band  
Angelical, and shall be set  
With those that, pure of earthly fret,  
Do guard the shrine miraculous.

“ In such a wise enrollèd was  
Sir Percivale ; and Lohengrin  
By like adventuring did win  
Among the holy knights to sit ;  
And many more of whom ye wit.  
And lately it the Lord hath pleased  
That yet another should be eased  
Of his long service and preferr'd  
Among the angels to be heard  
And scent the breath of heaven's rosen.  
And in his stead hast thou been chosen  
In much hard strife to be assay'd  
And for Christ's service fitting made.  
Wherefore this venture has been given  
To thee, in which thou now hast striven  
So wonder-well, that thou mightst win  
To purge thyself of earthly sin.  
And having in good sooth prevail'd  
Against all dangers that assail'd

Thee and this garden's purity,  
There is great bliss ordain'd for thee ;  
    For that thy name shall be enroll'd  
    Among those knights in ward that hold  
The blessed Grail ; and thou with me  
Beyond the billows of the sea  
    Shalt come to where that house is fair  
    Withouten any pain or care,  
And shalt awhile taste heaven's bliss,  
And on thy mouth shalt have the kiss  
    Of Christ the Lord, that doth assoil  
    All weariness of earthly toil  
And gives unto all sorrows peace  
Undying."

So the strain did cease  
Of his sweet speaking, and awhile  
The very sweetness of his smile  
Did hinder Floris from reply :  
And eke the thought of bliss so nigh  
His lips and all the ravishment  
Of promise that he did prevent  
In his imagining and lack  
Of words for utterance held back  
His tongue from speaking anything.  
But Galahad for answering  
Stay'd not, but, with a doubled grace  
Of sweet assurance in his face,  
Began to say, in very deed,

That presently there was great need  
They should withouten more delay  
Towards the dawning take their way,  
For many a mile the voyage was  
And for great distance tedious.

Then Floris said to him, " Fair knight,  
That in whole armour of pure white  
Dost serve God in all chastity,  
I pri'thee, lightly show to me  
How we may gain that distant land  
That by the rising sun is scann'd,—  
Since neither boat is here nor had?"

Whereat no word spake Galahad,  
But with his hand the sign he made,  
That makes all evil things afraid  
And compasses all good about  
With armour against sin and doubt ;  
And straightway with the holy sign  
A white cross in the air did shine  
A second, as for answering ;  
And then the stream's soft murmuring  
Grew louder to the sweep of waves  
Along the reed-crests and the glaives  
Of rushes, and its silver thread  
Into a river's mightihead  
Was stretch'd ; and on the stream did float  
The silver wonder of a boat,

Gold-keel'd and fair with silken sails,  
Such boat as, in old Eastern tales,  
The genii bring at the command  
Of some enchanter's magic wand.

And on the prow of cymophane—  
Translucent as the pearly wane  
Of that fair star that rules the night,  
With an internal glory bright—

The milk-white holy bird did sit  
And spread soft pinions over it,  
That flutter'd with desire of flight.

Therein stepp'd Galahad, Christ's knight ;

And after him did Floris come

At beckoning, wholly dazed and dumb  
With wonders of that wondrous time.

And as into the stern did climb

The valiant knight, the soft sweet wind

That 'mid the blossom'd trees was twined,

Ceased from its disport in the flowers

And leafage of those magic bowers,

And with such strong yet gentle stress

Within the silken sails did press

Towards the dawning, that the keel

Slid through the waters blue as steel

As swiftly as the morning sun

Shears through the mists when night is done

And day is golden in the sky.

And as it through the lymph did fly

Of that enchanted rivulet,  
The golden keel to song did fret  
The thronging currents, and the ring  
Of murmurous water-notes did sing  
And ripple in the diamond deeps,  
Such music as the West wind sweeps  
From out the harps of Fairyland,  
When elves are met on some sweet strand  
Of Broceliaund or Lyonesse,  
For revel and for wantonness.

On all sides round them as they went  
The dim grey woods were sad and spent  
With weariness of winter-time,  
And in the fields the rugged rime  
Held all things in the sleep of death,  
Stern white, and void of living breath ;  
And with the weary weight of snow  
The laden boughs were bent and low.  
But in their sails a breath there blew  
Of April zephyrs, and there drew  
Unto their course a summer cloud  
With scents of flowers and birdsongs strow'd ;  
And echoings of July woods—  
When in the green the bluebell broods—  
Were thick and sweet about their way,  
And ever round the boat's prow lay  
The scent of grass-swaths newly mown ;  
And wildflowers in gold grain and brown

Waved in the sweet dream-haunted air.

So went they,—while the night was bare  
Of sound or breath to break the sleep  
Of winter,—through the woodlands deep,  
And past the well-remember'd plains  
And towns and meadows, where the lanes  
And streets were hush'd with winter-time,—  
And saw no creature on the rime,  
Save some stray sheep shut out from fold  
Or wolf, that from his forest hold  
Was by hard hunger forced to seek  
Scant prey upon the moorlands bleak.

So ever without cease they sped  
Above that swift sweet river's bed ;  
And truly, as the golden morn  
From out the dim grey mists was born  
And all things 'gan to wake from sleep,  
They heard the silver rush and sweep  
Of waves upon a pebbled shore ;  
And gliding past the meadows frore,  
They came to where the river's tide  
Was fleck'd with foam, and far and wide  
The main, as far as eye could see,  
Slept in a sweet serenity.

Far out to seaward fled their boat,  
Across the wild white flowers that float



And blossom on the azure leas ;  
And swiftly as the culver flees  
    Among the trees with shadow twined,  
    They left the frozen fields behind,  
And saw the spangled foam divide  
The firmament on every side.

    The golden calm of summer seas  
    Was there, and eke the July breeze  
That waves upon the silver foam,  
When in the azure heaven's dome  
    The sign of summer-prime is set :  
    And still no winds opposed they met,  
Nor break of billows in their way ;  
But through the dancing ripples' play  
    The shallop sped towards the dawn,  
    As by some starry influence drawn  
Over the ridges of the main  
Unstirr'd and clear. And still the rain  
    Of blossoms fell about the stem,  
    And still sweet odours breathed on them  
Of rose and jasmine, and the song  
Of birds about the sail was strong.

    So over silver seas they went,  
    And heaven, wide-eyed for wonderment,  
Hung o'er them open blue the while,  
As though all nature were asmile  
    To see the lovely way they made :

And ever round the sharp keel play'd  
The fretted lacework of the foam,  
And through the jewell'd deeps did roam  
Great golden fish, and corals red  
Waved in the dim sweet goodlihead  
Of that clear blue ; and through the wave  
The shells of many a rich cave  
Were visible, wherein the sea  
Held in a sweet security  
Treasures of pearl and lovely gold,  
That eye of man might ne'er behold  
Until the main should leave its bed ;  
And over all the deeps was shed  
A glancing play of emerald light,  
So that the unembarrass'd sight  
Pierced through the cool sweet mystery  
Of folded billows, and the eye  
Was free in shadows jewel-clear.  
Nor was there anything of fear  
For them in lapse of hyaline  
Or silver breakers of the brine ;  
Nor in the crystals of the air  
Was anything but blithe and fair,  
Sweet winds and glitter of fair birds,  
Whose song was sweeter than sweet words  
Between the pauses of a kiss,  
When lovers meet in equal bliss.

So many a day they sail'd and long,

Lull'd by the breezes' flower-sweet song  
And pipe of jewel-birds that went  
Above them, fair to ravishment ;

Until, one morn, athwart the lift  
Of blue was visible a rift  
Of purple mountain ; and a spire  
Of amethyst rose ever higher

Into the sapphire firmament.

And drawing nigh, they saw where blent  
Its silver-currents with the blue

Of that bright ocean, blithe to view,

A fair clear river that outpour'd

Its waters 'twixt soft green of sward  
And slope of flower-besprinkled banks,  
Where rushes stood in arching ranks,

Tipt with a jewel of fair flower

As blue as is the morning hour,

When in the golden prime of May

The sweet dawn blends into the day.

The swift keel slid between the rows

Of ripples,—as a steed that knows

The road of some familiar place,—

And past the bubbled foamy race

Of eddies, through the sapphire cleft

Of that bright pass, and quickly left

The billows of the sea behind,

As on that goodly stream the wind

Did urge it far into the land.

Surely was never kingdom spann'd  
On earth by river such as this,  
Where ever some enchanted bliss  
Ran in the ripples, and the stream  
With liquid gold and pearl did seem  
To glitter. There is nought more fair  
Beneath the regions of the air  
Than this same river ; nor in all  
Birdnotes is aught more musical  
Than the delight of its clear flow  
Across the pebbles, soft and low.

And in the banks were wondrous things,  
All lovely creatures that bear wings ;  
And every precious thing of green,  
And flower of gold and jewell'd sheen,  
Was there in such a perfect shape,  
Its essence must full needs escape  
The grasp of my poor minstrelsy.  
The very grass was fair to see  
Beyond the fairest flower of earth ;  
For with the gold of some new birth  
It burnt, and was aflame with bright  
Sweet gladness. Very flames of light  
The flowers seem'd, zaffiran and blue  
And crystal-clear with wonder-dew.  
It seem'd their scent so heavenly was,  
That into music it must pass  
And soar into a perfumed song.

And as the boat was borne along  
 The golden ripples, in its speed  
 Dividing many a woven weed,  
 That with its many-colour'd mesh  
 Of trailing leaves and flowers did stretch  
 And wave upon the waters bright,—  
 Sir Floris, with what prayers he might,  
 That gracious Galahad besought  
 That from his lips he might be taught  
 What was that river and that realm,  
 That all earth's sweets did hide and whelm  
 In one etern forgetfulness,  
 And made all joys that men possess  
 Seem poor and naught with the delight  
 Of its exceeding lovely might.  
 And without pausing, Galahad  
 To him made answer fair and glad.

“ Fair knight, this land through which we pass,  
 About the city of Sarras  
 Doth lie ; and all the golden plain  
 Beyond thy vision, for demesne—  
 By grace and favour of high Heaven—  
 Unto the Holy Town was given,  
 Where lies in hold the blessed Grail.—

“ Before from Paradise did fail  
 Adam and Eva for their sin,  
 These happy fields and glades within

The golden gates of Eden were,  
Wherein was nothing but was fair :  
And this same river of those four  
Was one, that of old times did pour  
Blithe waters over all the plain,  
When life was young and free from stain,  
And angels walk'd upon the earth.  
And (for their flow) came never dearth  
Of kindly fruits nor any drought  
Of summer-time the place about ;  
Nor for the warmth of their clear flood  
Might winter nip the flowery bud  
Of the perpetual spring, that rain'd  
Fresh blossoms there ; nor ever waned  
The balms of summer in the air,  
But evermore the place was fair  
With all May-sweets and summer-spells.  
And still,—although the cloister'd dells  
Of the lost garden no more stand  
Upon the peace of the fair land,—  
Around its precincts, as of old,  
A silver stream with sands of gold  
Flows ever, which no foot of man,  
Or eye, without Christ's leave, can span ;  
Of all the four the only one  
That still with murmurous waves doth run  
In the old channel. Very fair  
Its marges are with all things rare ;  
And over all the land is strown

Thick bdellium and the onyx-stone.”

And many another wondrous thing  
Unto Sir Floris, listening,  
Spake Galahad of that fair land,  
That eye of man hath never scann'd,  
Save he have won to Christ His grace.  
And as he spoke, came on apace  
The tender day, and gilded all  
The ripples ; and the golden ball  
Of the sweet sun rose high in heaven ;  
And unto every thing was given  
New ravishment and new delight  
Of very waking. Fairer sight  
Saw mortal never (nor indeed  
So fair within our earthly need  
Is compass'd) than the morning hour  
That open'd into full sweet flower  
With many a rosy flush and rain  
Of golden sunlight over plain  
And mead, and many a tender shade  
Kiss'd into warmth—that in green glade  
Lay waiting for the frolic light—  
And changed to fleecy gold the white  
Of dawn-clouds over hill and wold.  
It was so gracious to behold  
The day in that sweet Paradise,  
There is no man with mortal eyes  
Could drink its beauty wholly in,

For dust of care and mirk of sin  
That hide much loveliness from men.

And Floris ever and again  
Was dumb with awe of much delight  
And wonderment; as with swift flight  
The boat sped through the flowers that shone  
With blazon'd gold and blue upon  
That magic river of a dream,  
He sat and stored the influence  
Of the lush balms within his sense,  
And watch'd the ripples all agleam  
With jewels, and the constant smile  
Of the sweet sunlight. And the while  
The songs of birds co-ordinate  
And zephyrs with a peace so great  
And sweet upon his soul did seize,  
And whiles his spirit had such ease  
In that sweet speech of Galahad,  
He needs forgot that aught of sad  
Or dreary in this life is set,  
Or weariness of earthly fret;  
And did, without a backward glance,  
Yield up himself into the trance  
Of that new joy.

So sped they on  
Towards the orient: and anon,—  
Whenas the noon was borne along



The midmost heaven, to the song  
Triumphal of the joyous choir  
Of birds and breezes, ever higher  
Soaring in one sweet antiphon,—  
There rose in the sweet sky—upon  
The fair broad hem of woven gold,  
That marged with many a fleecy fold  
The sapphire-chaliced firmament—  
A glitter of tall spires, that brent  
With an unearthly radiance ;  
And many a jewel-colour'd lance  
Of belfry pierced the golden air  
On the horizon ; and there bare  
The wind to them a strain of song  
Ineffable, the stream along—  
Faint for great distance—that for joy  
And triumph over earth's annoy  
With such a rapturous sweetness smote  
On Floris, he could neither note  
The kingdom's varied loveliness  
Nor the sweet antiphonal stress  
Of winds and birds and rivulet,  
But it alone could hear, nor let  
Himself from striving up to it ;  
For with its melody was knit  
About his soul an influence  
So strong, it seem'd his every sense  
Must press towards it. And at last,  
For ecstasy he would have cast

Himself headlong into the stream,  
That therewithal, as he did deem,  
    He might the swiftlier win toward  
    That wondrous singing and the ward  
Of that bright town miraculous.  
But Galahad the good knight was  
    Mindful of him, and by his arm  
    Withholding him therefrom, did charm  
His soul with such sweet words, that he  
Must for a while contented be  
    To wait the progress of the boat,  
    That very speedily did float,  
God wot, across the ripples' race,  
To where the turrets of the place  
    Were clear.

And so they came at last  
    To where the running river pass'd  
From the long lapse of pleasant wood  
And meadow with enchantments strew'd  
    Of flowers and sun-gold, and were ware  
    Of the bright town that all the air  
With towers and pinnacles did fill,  
Set on the slope of a soft hill,  
    That in the sun wore one clear hue  
    Of purple blending into blue,  
Most like a great sweet amethyst.

And now the gunwale softly kiss'd

The golden shore ; and, thick with gem  
And coral, round the entering stem  
Was wrinkled up the glittering sand.  
Then Galahad upon the strand  
Stepp'd lightly out ; and as his feet  
Upon the grainèd gold did meet  
Of the rich shingle, there was borne  
To them the noise of a blown horn,  
That was as if a warder blew  
To challenge, from some tower of view  
Within the amber-gated town ;  
Wherefrom to them it floated down  
And fill'd the air with echoings  
So sweet, there is no bird that sings  
Could find such music in his throat  
Melodious. And as the note  
Of welcome swell'd and waned around  
The hollows of the hills,—unwound  
From his mail'd breast Sir Galahad  
A silver horn he thereon had  
In its white baldrick, and therein  
Breathing, its hollow bell did win  
Unto so sweet an answering blast,  
It seem'd to Floris that at last  
He heard the trumps angelical.  
Then at the silver clarion's call  
The beryl gates were open'd wide  
Of the fair town ; and on the side  
Of the soft hill there was to them



Made visible—upon the hem  
 Of woven grass with blue-bells strew'd  
 And asphodels—a multitude  
 Of holy knights, that down the sward  
 In a bright painted pageant pour'd,  
 With many a waving pennoncel  
 Of gold and azure ; and the swell  
 Of clarions, co-ordinate  
 To mystic harmonies, did wait,  
 With cadences most grave and sweet,  
 Upon the rhythm of their feet.  
 So goodly were they of aspect  
 And in such pictured raiment deck'd  
 Of say and samite, there is none,  
 Minstrel or bard, beneath the sun,  
 That could have sung of their array  
 As it befits to sing it,—nay,  
 Not even he who many a day  
 In Fäerie enchanted lay  
 And learnt full many a year and long  
 The cadences of elfin song,  
 True Thomas ; nor that couthliest wight  
 In gramarye, that Merlin hight.

Full bright their arms and lucent were  
 And of a sheen so wonder-fair,  
 The sun seem'd of a nobler kind  
 To glitter, when his beamings shined  
 Upon the silver-mirror'd mail.

And at the sight of them did fail  
Sir Floris' courage, that till now  
Had never seen thing high enow  
To give him pause ; for there did come  
So strange a fear on him, that dumb  
And cold he grew, and haply might  
Have swoon'd away for sheer affright  
Of wonder and great reverence  
That lay upon his every sense.  
Indeed, awhile the blood did leave  
Its courses and great awe did weave  
Strange terrors in him ; and with pain  
And fear despiteous, he was fain  
To hide his visage from the might  
Of that much brightness.

Then that knight  
Sir Galahad laid hands on him,  
And quickly freed him from the grim  
Sad grasp of that unreal fear,  
And bade him that of right good cheer  
He should become, for knighthood's sake,  
And for his honour comfort take  
And new stout heart ; for shame it was  
And despite, one so valorous  
And bold in arms should faint and fail,  
Where he most surely should prevail,  
'Midst those that now his comrades were  
And fellow-knights : and with much fair

Discourse did win him from affright.  
So that at last he dared the sight  
Of those fair knights, and saw they gazed  
Right courteously on him and praised  
His hard-won victory. So he took  
New heart, and with assurèd look  
Leapt out upon the jewell'd sand :  
And as the twain were come to land,  
From those knights all so sweet a sound  
Of songful greeting did resound,  
The blue of heaven could never tire  
Of answering ; and from many a lyre  
And cithern the alternate joy  
Of harpings join'd in sweet alloy  
Its silver with that golden song.

So Floris was among that throng  
Of knights received, with many a kiss  
And glad embracement : nor, I wis,  
Fail'd Galahad that he should name  
Each knight that to the greeting came.  
To him was Titurel made known,  
And Percivale, to whom was shown—  
With Bors—such grace of God most high,  
By reason of much purity,  
That they alone with Galahad  
Upon the earthly questing had  
The blessed vision of the Grail :  
Nor Lohengrin to him did fail ;

And many another noble knight  
Of fabled prowess and approved  
In gentillesse and all Christ loved,  
Did there rejoice him with his sight.

So, for the meed of his good fight,  
Into the wonder-town they bare  
Sir Floris,—wherein many a rare  
Delight to him appointed was.

Bright was the place and glorious  
With glory of the abiding love  
Of God and Christ, that is above  
All splendours marvellous and fair;  
And luminous its ramparts were  
With pearls and rubies constellate  
And diamonds into such state  
And harmony as, save in heaven,  
Unto no place or thing is given  
To wear or look on : such a blaze  
Of joy was there, without amaze ;  
For all was gracious and sweet  
With Christ His grace. The very feet  
That fell upon the jewell'd stones  
Compell'd them to such silver tones  
Of music, and the ruffled air  
Was stirr'd to harmonies so fair,  
And, for mere passage through the place,  
Was won to such a subtle grace

Of perfume, that therein to be  
 And move was one long ecstasy :  
 And there the dole of earth and stress  
 Of hope unfill'd and weariness  
 Was purged, and life was one delight  
 Of perfect function, by the might  
 Unfailing of the doubtless soul ;  
 And every act and thought was whole  
 In strifeless accord. If one spoke,  
 The hinder'd voice no longer broke  
 Into harsh sadness, spent and wried  
 With weary effort, but did glide  
 Into an unconstrain'd consent  
 Of harmony and ravishment  
 Unstressful ; and the every geste  
 Was with like subtle grace possess'd,  
 And every faculty was cast  
 In symmetry, what time one pass'd  
 The portals of the place, and heard  
 The echoes of his feet that stirr'd  
 The holy quiet.

So the spell  
 Of the charm'd place on Floris fell  
 Transfiguringly, as the wide  
 Gold-trellised leaves on either side  
 Swung back for him : there came a change  
 Upon his senses, and a strange  
 Sweet ease of life, as if the soul,



Way-worn and rusted with the dole  
And fret of earth, were softly riven  
From him, and in its stead were given  
To him a new and perfect one,  
In a whole body as the sun  
Lucent, and worthy for the seat  
Of the fair spirit.

Up the street  
Gold-paven and with chrysolite  
And jacinth marged, they brought the knight,  
Past many a goodly hostelry  
And many a dwelling fair to see,  
Unto a portal sculptured all  
With handiwork angelical,  
In stories of the love of Christ,  
And all the times it hath sufficed  
To win sad living to much ease ;—  
And passing through with harmonies  
Of choral song, they came unto  
A vaulted courtyard, stretching through  
A cloister'd vista to fair halls  
Of alabaster, where the walls  
With many a colour'd crystal shone  
Of jewell'd casement ; and thereon  
The questing of the Holy Grail,  
In many a wonder-lovely tale,  
Was with bright gold and wonderment  
Of colour'd jewel-fretwork blent

To harmony, depicted.

And there, in truth, Sir Floris read,—  
Beside much other venturing,  
And many another goodly thing  
Achieved in service of the Lord,—  
The fight that he with his good sword  
Had in the wonder-garden fought.  
Nor, therewithal, was missing aught  
Of all that did that night befall  
Unto him : but upon the wall  
Was in bright colours pictured forth  
The tale of all his knightly worth  
And service.

Little strange it is  
If much he wonder'd was at this,  
And could for wonder scarce believe  
His eyes, that any should achieve  
So vast a work and of such grace  
And splendour in so scant a space  
Of time. But Lohengrin besought  
Him very fairly that of nought  
He saw he should be wonderèd,  
Nor any venture have in dread ;  
Since that to that high Lord, that there  
Did reign, all wonders easy were  
And wonderless ; nor of His grace  
Was anything in all that place  
That might avail for any fear.

Or doubt, but rather to give cheer  
And love and confidence was fit,  
So sweet a peace did dwell in it  
Of amity and holiness.

Then with slow feet they did address  
Their further steps,—by a long aisle  
Of cloister'd pearl, wherethrough the smile  
Of sunlight filter'd lingeringly  
And lay in one sweet soften'd sea  
Of gold upon the silver mail,—  
Towards the temple of the Grail.

And in a vestibule, that was  
Thereto adjacent, did they pause  
And in fair garments clad the knight,  
With silver radiant and white.

And then into an armoury  
They led him, very fair to see  
With noble weapons, all arow  
Against the wainscot. There a snow  
Of plumes upon his crest they bound,  
And from the swords that hung around  
A goodly blade was given him,  
That to the sound of many a hymn  
And many a golden litany,  
Had in the glorious armoury  
Of highest heaven forgèd been :  
So trenchant was it and so keen,—  
Being in celestial fires assay'd

And in strange dews of heaven made  
Attemper'd,—there might none withstand  
The thunderstroke of that good brand,  
    Except his bosom armour'd were  
    With equal virtue. Then the fair  
Graven presentment of a dove  
With eyes of gold was set above  
    His helm,—most like the fowl that brought  
    Him to the garden where he wrought  
Such deeds of arms ; and on the field  
Cœrulean of his virgin shield  
    There was a like resemblant set,  
    That men might know him, when they met  
In sharp sword-play or battle-throng.

Then, with a ripple of sweet song,  
    The golden doors were backward roll'd,  
    That in sweet mystery did fold  
The holy place ; and Floris came  
Into a hall, where with a flame  
    Of jewel'd light the air was gilt ;  
    And therewithin the walls were built  
Of that clear sapphire jewelry  
That can in nowise elsewhere be  
    Save for the pavement of the sky  
    And for the throne of God most high.  
And under foot the floor was bright  
With one clear topaz, as the light  
    Of the sweet sun in hue. Above

There was y-sprad a flower-bell roof  
Of that sweet colour of deep blue  
One in the spring may chance to view,  
When in the golden-threaded moss  
The deep wood-dells are odorous  
With violets and the cluster'd bells  
Of bee-loved hyacinths, or else  
The deep clear colours pers and inde  
Of wild-flowers in the gold corn twined  
With many a tassel of bright blue,  
When summer in the skies is new.—  
And in the bell were golden lights,  
Most like the tender eye-delights  
Of the gold kingcups in the green,  
That in quaint wise were set between  
The fretted azure of the dome.  
And therethorough did meteors roam,  
As 'twere in truth the very heaven,  
And the sweet symbols of the seven  
Great angels that do rule the skies  
Were therein jewell'd. In such wise  
The varied lights were mixt and blent  
With those that heavenward were sent  
From walls and pavement,—all the air  
Was with that lightsomeness most fair  
And tender fill'd, that in the May  
Is weft about the sweet young day,  
When whiles it seems the sky is dight  
With one great primrose of soft light,

Most pure and tender. On the ground  
There stood fair statues all around,  
    Deep-set in woven flowers and green  
    Of lavish leafage, stretch'd between  
Tall carven pillars of that bright  
Jewel that chrysoberyl hight,  
    And many another precious stone.  
Nor there were images alone  
Of holy things, as one might deem ;  
But eke full many a lovely dream  
    Of tender love and constancy  
    Was in clear gold and ivory  
With loving hand made manifest.  
For there was nothing there confess'd  
    Of sin or wantonness in love,—  
    As ancient doctors teach, that prove  
All pleasant things that are, to be  
Unloved of God. And verily  
Sir Floris wonder'd there to see  
    The histories that makers tell  
    Of Parisate and Floridelle,  
The tale of Tristan and Ysolde,  
    Of Lancelot and Guenevere,  
And many another tale of old,  
    That men on earth do dully lere  
That we should count accurst and ill :  
But there depicted were they still,  
    In very piteous fashion told ;  
    And on the wall in words of gold

Was writ this legend, "*Quiconque aime  
Complait a Dieu en pechié mesme.*"

And while Sir Floris stood and gazed  
Upon the statues,—much amazed  
At all that he did hear and see  
Within the temple,—suddenly  
There was a fluted singing heard,  
As of some wonder-lovely bird.  
And then one took him by the hand,  
And led him where a gold screen spann'd  
The topaz paved work of the floor.

Then was he ware of a high door,  
That with much wonderwork of gold  
And unknown metals was enscroll'd  
In many a trellis of fair flowers  
And fronds enough fair for the bowers  
Of Paradise ; and in the leaves  
There sat a bird, that was as sheaves  
Of ripen'd corn in hue, and sang—  
That therewithal the temple rang—  
Of unknown glories of the May,  
Therein where life is one long day  
Of spring and never change is there,  
Nor any sadness in the air.  
And as he sang, the golden gate  
Swung open slowly, and the great  
Sweet hollow of a pure white pearl

Lay clear behind that golden merle,  
Into a chamber fashionèd.

There was an altar built and spread  
With tapestry of silver white,  
Woven with lilies ; and thereon  
Was set a chalice, out of one  
Great emerald moulded,—with samite,  
The colour of the heart's best blood,  
Enshrouded ; and thereover stood  
A great white cross and fill'd the air  
With living radiance, as it were  
A sculptured work of very light.

Then with the wonder of the sight  
Was Floris fill'd ; and for great awe  
And reverence of all he saw  
Within the pearl, straightway he fell  
Upon his knees. But Titurel  
With counsel very fair and wise  
Required of him that he should rise  
From off the ground and without fear  
Unto the altar should draw near  
And for an offering thereon  
Should lay those blossoms he had won  
In parlous fight and much duresse,  
That of their blended goodliness  
And eke their perfume's ravishment,  
There might a sacrifice be sent,



To God and Christ acceptable.

And now a wondrous thing befell,  
(God grant us all the like to see) ;  
For as Sir Floris reverently  
    Upon the silver cloth did lay  
    The holy flowers (that, sooth to say,  
Were bright of bloom and sweet of scent,  
Unfaded, as when first they sprent  
    The greensward) and withdrawing thence  
    A little space, in reverence  
The issue did await,—there came  
A hand all shapen out of flame,  
    And from the emerald of the cup  
    The crimson samite lifted up ;  
And as this thing was done, there fell—  
As 'twere from out the midmost bell—  
    A light that through the emerald sped  
    And mingled with the holy bread ;  
And with the light, came one that pass'd  
Thought-swift athwart the air and cast  
    Himself into the cup,—as 'twere  
    The angel of a child,—most fair  
And awful. Wherewithal thereout  
There went a fire the place about,  
    And fill'd the temple with its breath,  
    Wherein was neither hurt nor death ;  
But of its contact there were given  
To Floris very balms of heaven

For consecration ; and to eat  
There was vouchsafed him food so sweet  
And goodly such as no man knows.

Then from the chalice'd gem there rose  
The semblance of a face, that was  
With such a splendour glorious  
And awful—and withal as mild  
And tender as a little child—  
There is no bard can sing of it  
As it becometh, save he sit  
(And hardly then) among the choirs,  
That to the throb of golden lyres  
Do praise God ever night and day  
With music such as no man may.—  
There is but one of woman born  
By whom such aspect can be worn  
Of perfect love and perfect awe  
Commingle'd.

And when Floris saw  
The glory of the eyes, and knew  
The holy love, that like a dew  
From out their radiant deeps was shed  
Upon his soul,—for very dread  
Of ravishment he could not gaze  
Upon their light, but with amaze  
And wonderment of joy was fain  
Down to the earth to bend again

His face : but ere he ceased to see  
The vision, of a surety  
    It was made known to him (although  
    He wist not how he came to know)  
That heavenly face no other's was  
Than that same Lord's who erst did pass  
    Before his vision in the green  
    Of the fair garden, all beseen  
With glittering hair.

                                    Then as he knelt,  
Unseeing, suddenly he felt  
    Upon his mouth a burning kiss,  
    That with such sharp unearthly bliss  
His soul did kindle into flame  
Of ravishment, the wayworn frame  
    Could not for frailty sustain  
    The rapturous ecstatic pain  
Of that strange joyance, nor the spright  
Embodied, 'gainst the fierce delight  
    Endure of that unearthly boon ;  
    And so for bliss he fell aswoon,  
And heard therein a great sweet voice,  
That bade him fear not, but rejoice,  
    For Christ the Lord his lips had kiss'd ;  
    And therewithal the Eucharist  
Was borne into his mouth, with sound  
Of harps angelic all around  
    Soft-smitten ; nor therefore did break

His charmèd sleep.

Then did one speak  
To him as in the trance he lay,  
And with a murmurous voice did say,  
That for the service of that Lord,  
To whom was sacred now his sword,  
It was ordain'd that for a space  
He should return unto his place  
Upon the earth, and in all things  
That life on earth to mortals brings,  
Should for his Master's honour strive,  
Until the order'd time arrive  
When God should set him free from soil  
And weariness of earthly toil.  
And there was given him a sign  
When it should please the Lord Divine  
To make His will beneficent  
Patent to him,—there should be sent,  
Twice more before the period set  
For his release from earthly fret,  
To him the self-same silver dove,  
The holy symbol of the love  
Of Christ and of His chivalry.  
And it was told him that when he  
Of the white messenger had wit,  
He should leave all and follow it:  
For when it should of him be seen  
Anew, as it of late had been,

He should be ware that God had need  
Of him elsewhere—in very deed—  
Upon the earth, and will'd essay  
His service yet within the way  
Of living : but what time he heard  
The thrice-said summons, and the bird  
Miraculous unto him came  
A third time, in the holy name,—  
He should, in following, be freed  
From toil and labour and the need  
And weariness of day and night,  
And from the knowledge and the sight  
Of men be ravish'd, to abide  
In that fair town beatified,  
And serve the Grail, till it seem'd fit  
Unto the Lord that he should sit  
Among the blest in Paradise  
And praise Him ever.

In this wise

It seem'd to Floris that one spoke  
To him with soft sweet speech, that broke  
His slumber not, as he did lie  
In that long swoon ; and, suddenly,  
The murmur of the speech forsook  
His hearing wholly ; nor with look  
Or ears awhile was anything  
Apparent to him, that could bring  
The wonders of the holy town

Back to his senses ; but the brown  
And fleecy-plumaged wings of sleep  
Inclosed him wholly. In a deep  
And senseless dream awhile he lay,  
Until it seem'd to him the gray  
Of night that compass'd him about  
Was by a radiance from without  
Transmicate, and the fluted song  
Of the gold merle again was strong  
Upon his hearing. Then the dim  
Gray webs of slumber were from him  
Unfolded slowly, and there burst  
A golden light on him. At first  
The drowsy cumber on his eyes  
Allow'd him not to recognize  
The place wherein he was, nor know  
Wherefrom the amber-colour'd glow  
Of light was borne : but speedily  
He was aware that he did lie  
Upon his bed, and through the fold  
Of silken tapestries the gold  
Of the young sun upon his face  
Was shed ; and past the window-space,  
Without the casement, could he see,—  
Snow-pure against brown stem and tree,—  
The charmèd flowerage of that thorn  
That ever on the Christmas morn  
Is—for a memory and delight  
Of the Lord's birth—with blossoms white

Transfigure. And on a spray  
There sat a mavis brown and grey,  
That sang as if his heart were shed  
Into his minstrelsy and fled  
On wings of music heavenward,  
A sacrifice of song outpour'd  
To God most high.

Awhile it seem'd  
To Floris he had surely dream'd  
The coming of the dove to him  
And all his strife against the grim  
Fierce beasts, and all the after-bliss  
And wonderment, and Christ His kiss.  
But looking closelier, he was ware  
At bed-head of his helm that bare  
A silver dove with eyes of gold,  
That on the crest did sit and fold  
White wings above it ; and he knew  
The holy semblant on the blue  
Of his fair shield, and eke the blade  
Celestial, by his harness laid  
Naked at bedfoot. So the doubt  
Was from his spirit blotted out ;  
And he was surely certified  
That verily he did abide  
That wondrous venture, and had known  
Awhile the glories that alone  
For those that many a toil have dared

In Christ His service, are prepared  
Within the city of the Grail,  
Wherein is neither pain nor wail,  
But ever holiness and peace  
And ravishment without surcease,  
In very perfectness of rest.

\* \* \* \*

So hath Sir Floris found his quest ;  
And so the tale is told and done,  
Of how, before life's rest was won,  
The first time unto Floris came  
The holy dove, in Lord Christ's name.

*Christmas, 1868.*







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